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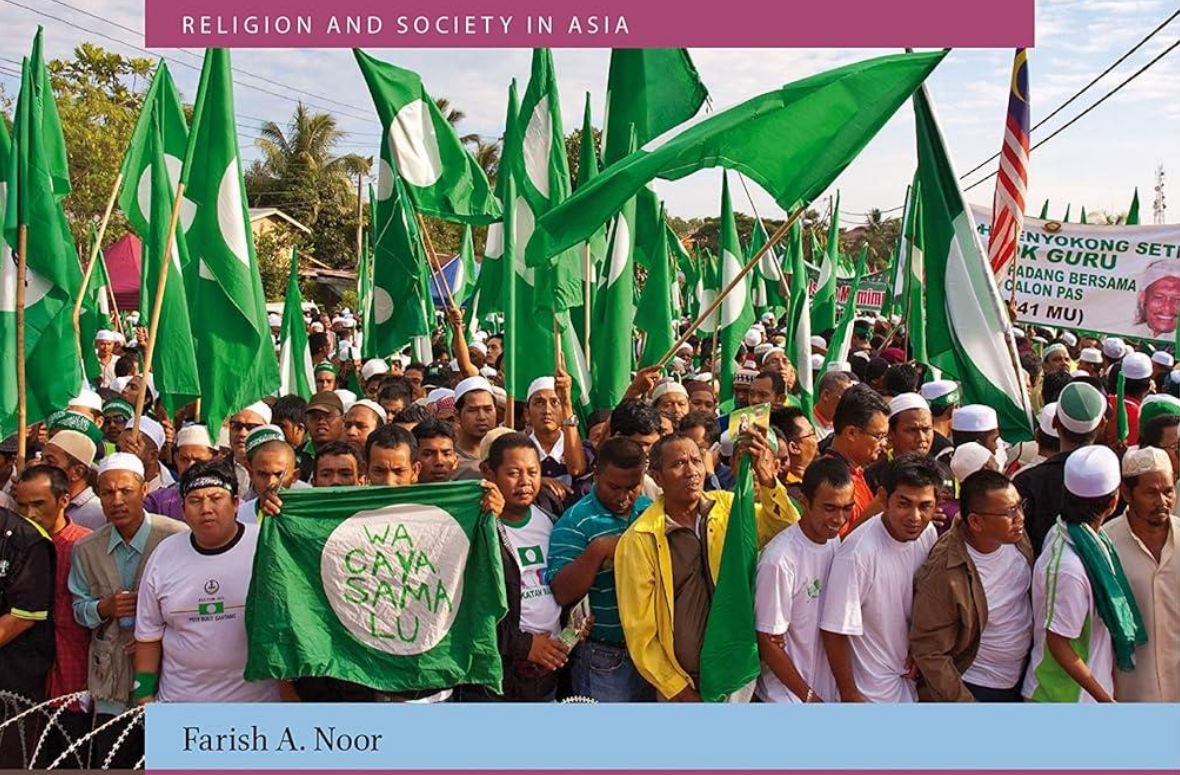

Farish A. Noor

The Malaysian Islamic Party PAS 1951-2013

Islamism in a Mottled Nation

Amsterdam
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The Malaysian Islamic Party PAS 1951-2013

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Dedicated to my mother,
Noraishah,
who taught me that to understand how a plant grows,
one must first understand the soil in which it is rooted.

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Introduction

Islamism in a Mottled Nation: The Story of PAS

A story never dies, even when the breath is no longer ours. It stays trapped under a century, or on the floor of a dark sea, waiting for a new teller.
Omar Musa, *A Trance* (*Parang*)

Without a convenient epiphany, historians are left forever chasing shadows, painfully aware of their inability ever to reconstruct a dead world in its completeness, however thorough or revealing their documentation. Of course, they make do with other work: the business of formulating problems, of supplying explanations about cause and effect. But the certainty of such answers always remains contingent on their unavoidable remoteness from their subjects. We are doomed forever, hailing someone who has just gone around the corner and out of earshot.[1]
Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties*

Where and When We Are: Locating PAS in Today's Overdetermined and Highly Contested Malaysia

In July 2013, barely two months after Malaysia's thirteenth general elections, the country found itself at yet another one of the many crossroads of its history. A cursory overview of the headlines in the mainstream press would suggest that the Federation of Malaysia was being assailed by a host of internal and external threats; ranging from the revival of Communism (long since banned) to the scourge of Western-sponsored liberal advocacy groups that were championing the cause of women's rights, ethnic and religious minorities as well as marginalised gender groupings; from foreign insurgents to clandestine Shia Muslim cells operating on the campuses of the country.[2] The nation, it seemed, was more vulnerable than ever to radical contingency and unpredictability.

Yet in the midst of this apparent chaos, analysts could discern hints of normality and predictability in the nation's discourse and political behaviour. Being one of the most ethnically and religiously complex nations in

1 Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties: Unwarranted Speculations; Gr*anta Books, London, 1991. P. 320.

2 See *PAS: We Have No Links to Syiah Teachings*, www.malaysiakini.com, 28 July 2013; *Jakim Watching Growing Shia Movement-Bernama,* TheMalaysianInsider.com, 28 July 2013.

the world, Malaysia had long since grown familiar with the phenomenon of race-based and religion-based politics in the country. And though the phenomenon of race-based parties may seem alien, or even anathema, to some foreign observers, this has in fact been the norm in Malaysia even before the nation's independence, and it points to the long shadow cast by a century of divisive plural politics that sustained what was in effect a form of racialised capitalism that was the engine of Empire.

In the midst of this cacophony of voices – some strident, some hysterical, some moderate and some muted – the Malaysian public is constantly being offered a range of alternatives to choose from. One of these is the *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* – the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS – which is the subject of this book. PAS today is the biggest opposition party in Malaysia, with the largest number of members and supporters of any opposition party that functions legally in the Malaysian context. It has developed its own domestic political economy, spawning offshoots in the local Islamist pop industry that produces t-shirts, posters, DVDs, cassettes, and the like, and has a parallel economic-political-religious network that brings together the members of the party across the entire Malaysian Federation. That such a thing is possible at all is a testimony to the commitment, endurance and determination of the party's members themselves, many of whom may not even realise today that when PAS was first formed in the early 1950s there were many who confidently speculated that it would never last. Few observers of Malaysian politics in the 1950s would have been able to guess that the day would come when PAS would hold its head up as a member of a transnational, global network of Islamist parties worldwide, putting PAS in the same ranks as the Jama'at-e Islami of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, the Ikhwan'ul Muslimin of Egypt and the Arab states, the AKP of Turkey, as well as the numerous Islamist parties that now seem so close to power in countries like Tunisia and the rest of the Muslim world.

This book tells the story of PAS, and how the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party developed to become one of the most prominent – if not *the* most prominent – Islamist party in Malaysia and Southeast Asia today, and how it has struggled for more than six decades on the path towards state capture. It is primarily a historical account of the Islamist party, and its focus will be on the manifold circumstances and factors that contributed to the development and rise of that entity itself. But it is also a history of the discourse of PAS, and how for decades the idea of political Islam and the goal of the Islamic state was discursively mediated by a succession of PAS leaders and ideologues, who kept that ambition burning bright even in the darkest of days.

But PAS cannot and should not be studied in isolation. As a movement, a political entity and an *idea*, it had never emerged *sui generis* by and of itself, as if appearing miraculously in some historical-structural vacuum. The story of PAS – if it is to be told in its entirety as best that I can – has to be a story that is linked to other parallel stories: of the adversaries of PAS, of the historical circumstances that necessitated and determined its birth, and of the society that was its midwife, too. As such, the story of PAS is invariably the story of Malaysia as well, for through my recounting of the story of the Islamist movement of Malaysia, I will be recounting and remembering the many broken threads of narratives that once criss-crossed and overlapped one another. PAS is what it is today largely due to the socio-cultural mould that shaped it, and in assessing PAS's place and standing in the world at present, we also gain an insight into how Malaysia, by extension, sees and presents itself to the world as well.

Work on this book began in 1999, shortly before the general elections of that year. I was tasked with observing the elections closely, and when asked by members of the media to speculate about the possible results, I offered my opinion that the Malaysian Islamist party would do very well. This response was greeted with a mixture of surprise and alarm, for even then the prospect of political victory handed over to Islamists was received with a combination of scorn and trepidation. But PAS did well, as expected, and in the wake of the elections I decided to write a short monograph on the history of the party that I hoped would answer the probing enquiries of other journalists in the future. That modest aim was compromised by my inability to edit judiciously, and temper my analysis with economy. The net result was not one but several essays and monographs on PAS, as well as a two-volume history that has strained the backs of dozens of unfortunate students by now.

Yet the story of PAS did not end there, for how could it ever? In the decade and a half that followed, PAS underwent a series of changes, adopted a number of avatars and assumed a myriad of positions. Any attempt at a final analysis of the party proved futile, for the vagaries of Malaysian politics and the constant manoeuvrings of all the actors on its stage meant that neat and totalising definitions and categorisations were next to impossible. My initial attempt to close the story of PAS and end it with a final, arresting full-stop turned out to be a *Tristram Shandy*-esque enterprise, for the subject itself refused to submit to such lazy encapsulation. Over the past decade, PAS has grown even more complex, more populist, more dynamic and more inscrutable as well.

Accounting for the early historical development of PAS had not been an easy task. I was fortunate in the sense that when work on the subject first

began, I was still able to meet and interview some of the first leaders of the party, who were willing to talk about the teething years of the movement. I was, however, less fortunate when it came to the search for primary sources in documented form. PAS, during its early days, rarely kept records and documents in a systematic manner, and there were no extensive archives to work through: most of the information had to be acquired through long interviews with the early members, many of whose memories had begun to fade. Up to the late 1980s at least, the scant material written on PAS tended to be of a cursory nature, with the exception of the works of Funston, Kessler, Muzaffar and Liow. Worse still was the tendency of PAS's critics and adversaries to publish works that tended to be of an overtly biased nature, though even these proved useful for cross-referencing and triangulating some of the data.

This work that you have before you now was started when I began teaching at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. My thanks go to the Dean of RSIS, Barry Desker, who was kind enough to allow this roving academic his occasional jaunt through Malaysia to collect data that formed part of a wider research project on contemporary religious politics across Southeast Asia. Thanks are also due to my colleague and Deputy Dean Joseph Liow, who likewise was and is a fellow-traveller in the field of contemporary religious politics, and whose interest in PAS equals my own. On many occasions he was the one most supportive of this endeavour, and I am grateful for that.

Prior to my present posting in Singapore I had worked in Paris, Leiden and longer still in Berlin, where I was part of a joint research project on the transnational transfer of religious education between South and Southeast Asia. In Berlin, my thanks go to my long-term friend and colleague, Dietrich Reetz, whose knowledge of the Islamist movements of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh was of crucial relevance to my own study of similar movements in Malaysia and Indonesia. During our joint seven-year research project, we mapped together the global network of religious seminaries (*madrasahs*) and educational institutions that also overlapped with the global network of the religio-political parties and movements we were studying. It is no exaggeration to say that this work would never have taken on the form it has now, were it not for this long and fruitful collaboration between the two of us.

Thanks are also due to Gudrun Kramer of Freie University Berlin and to Ulrike Freitag of the Zentrum Moderner Orient, where I was based during my seven years in Germany. It was at these institutions that much of my preliminary work on global Islamism was first undertaken, and there that

I truly appreciated the need for a long-term historical and comparative approach to my study. During the course of my long sojourn in Europe, there were many scholars whose works had impact upon my own and whose ideas have shaped the final outcome of this research. Martin van Bruinessen's work on the Islamist parties and movements of Indonesia and Turkey were vital to me, for they reminded me of the need to place PAS in a broader regional perspective, and to note the similarities and distinctions between the trends of Islamism in Malaysia and Indonesia, its closest and oldest regional neighbour. Khalid Masud's work on the role of the *ulama* in Muslim history was likewise crucial to my understanding of the important role played by that class of scholars in the internal politics of PAS. Bobby Sayyid's analysis of the rise of Islamism as a counter-hegemonic discourse directed against Westernised elites and eurocentric epistemology reminded me of the deeper import of Islamism as a body of ideas. Armando Salvatore's work on the Muslim engagement with modernity proved instructive in helping me to frame the latter-day PAS in its proper philosophical-theological context; and Olivier Roy's observations on the rise and fall of contemporary Islam reminded me of the inherently political nature of such movements and the political terrain that they have chosen as the site of their struggle. To all of them, and to the numerous colleagues and students whom I had the pleasure to work with and teach, I offer my most sincere thanks.

Ultimately, however, the form and content of this book, as well as whatever flaws it may contain, is my responsibility. I have described this work as a historical account of the development of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS and, as such, the reader ought not to be too surprised to see the narrative progressing in a sequential manner. However, I have always maintained that PAS's history has never been a linear or deterministic one, and so I have tried to highlight and capture this contingency in PAS's history by giving equal emphasis to the other alternative developments, parallel goings-on, and radical might-have-beens that have always accompanied PAS along its long journey to where it is today. This was, therefore, an attempt to capture contingency in history, which may sound like a contradiction in terms – somewhat akin to capturing movement in a static photograph. But photographs do capture the *impression* of movement, and in the same way I have tried to depict, to the best of my ability, the impression of chance, randomness and accidents that have always been the bedfellows of PAS as well.

The reader will notice as well my tendency to slip into long discussions on discursive formations and the role of discourse in the identity formation of PAS and its members. I emphasise this to make the point that no study of any political movement or structure would be complete if it does

not take into account the ideational content of such formations as well. Though a study of the political economy of Islamism is indeed relevant and important – and this work hopes to do justice to that aspect of PAS – I would maintain nonetheless that Islamism is something particular in itself, and thus needs to be looked at closely for what it is. PAS is a *political* party, and as such plays the role that political parties are wont and expected to do. But PAS is also an *Islamist* party, and as such what constitutes its sphere of activity and its horizons of possibility are determined by the limits of the discourse that defines it for what it is. This will, I hope, help to explain some of the decisions and subject-positions that have been assumed by PAS over the past few decades, which may not be fully comprehensible if it were to be looked at solely from a mechanistic angle, without taking into account the ideas that have driven it along. Simply put, some of the positions taken by PAS may not make sense from a political perspective, but they do make sense from an Islamist perspective; and PAS, as an Islamist party, has to satisfy both needs at the same time – which is not an easy task by half.

Another caveat is to be added to the list here, and it has to do with my own subject-position vis-à-vis the subject at hand. Living and working as we do in a post-9-11 era where *all* forms of religio-politics are viewed with some suspicion, and political Islam in particularly regarded as something sinister and askew, I have tried to inject as little of myself as possible into the work. Though it would be naïve to expect any work of this nature and on such a subject to be entirely free of subjective bias, I hope that I have succeeded in giving a balanced and objective portrait of the party under study. Years ago, a passing acquaintance had opined thus: *"So you are going to work on PAS? Good! Crush them in your book!"* I would maintain that the work of an academic has nothing to do with crushing or the demolition industry, and I sincerely hope that this work will not be taken as an example of academic 'bulldozing'. If there are internal flaws and contradictions within PAS – which there are, as in any political party, religious or non-religious – then they ought to be the subject of serious academic analysis rather than demonisation or stereotyping. And if at times, in my accounting of the history of PAS, I present an image of the party that lives up to the stereotype of the radical Islamist movement of today, then I hope that this has more to do with the ill-chosen stances and posturing adopted by the party rather than my subjective perspectivism. PAS is indeed a complex entity to study and behold, and it is to be expected that such a complex entity would also have its faults, contradictions and weaknesses.

Having said that, it shall be noted here at the outset that to apprehend PAS in its entirety would be beyond the capacity of this work. This cannot

be read as an exhaustive and all-encompassing study of PAS, not least for the simple reason that the story of PAS is far from over, and is not likely to end anytime soon. But it is an attempt to sketch out the broad contours of the party, its internal complexity and its manifold manifestations over time; which I argue also happens to reflect the context in which PAS found itself, namely the history of colonial and postcolonial Malaysia.

The first chapter thus looks at the emergence of PAS in the pre-independence era, and how the party was forced to weather the storms of the first two decades of Malaya's (and later Malaysia's) postcolonial history. PAS was one of the many parties that had appeared on the political scene in the nation, and during its initial stages of development, it was regarded as one of the foremost anti-colonial parties of the country. During this time, PAS experienced its baptism by fire, as it sought to reconcile the demand for independence with its own stated goal of creating an Islamic state in Malaysia. This, as I will show, was a task fraught with difficulties and one which was in many respects circumscribed and forestalled by the polarising logic of the Cold War that soon befell the new country that found itself surrounded by hostile neighbours.

In the following chapter, I chart PAS's next stage of evolution when it flirted with the idea of ethno-nationalism, presenting itself as both an Islamist party and as the foremost defender of Malay identity in a Malaysia that was soon becoming divided along the fault lines of race and ethnicity. Again, I locate PAS not only in its local national context; I also chart the development of the party in relation to developments abroad, and show how PAS's experiment with ethno-nationalism cost it dearly, coming as it did at a time when Islamist movements worldwide were being swept in the other direction, towards a more globally oriented Islamist wave that exceeded the narrow confines of national boundaries and ethnic distinctions.

The next chapter then looks at PAS in the tumultuous 1980s and 1990s, when it rode on the wave of global Islamism that had been unleashed in the wake of the Iranian Revolution, and when the tone and tenor of the Malaysian Islamist party grew more radical and uncompromising as a result of its growing association with Islamist movements and parties abroad. Again, the local, regional and international arenas of Muslim politics serve as the backdrop against which the Malaysian Islamist party framed and positioned itself; this was also the era in which PAS stepped out of its narrow national confines and placed itself amongst the ranks of the global Islamist movement, falling in step with other anti-state oppositional Islamist parties the world over.

The following chapter then looks at the PAS of today that has emerged in the wake of the 2004, 2008 and 2013 general elections and has adjusted

itself to the new realities of the age of the war on terror. PAS's current experiment with Islamist democracy is, as I shall show, the latest expression of its Islamist aims and ambitions that have been reconfigured according to the vocabulary and epistemology of the present; this is demonstrated through a range of new communication infrastructures and technologies that are the children of the postmodern age in which we live. In all the cases that I will present, it will be seen that PAS has never been out of step with the social, economic and political realities of the country that it seeks to govern one day. If anything, PAS's constant manoeuvring and shifting of positions correctly mirrors the state of incessant change that has been one of the few constant norms in Malaysian politics, thus rendering the party and the country predictable to a certain extent, and thus open to analysis. And analysing the history of PAS – and Malaysia – is what I propose to do now, so I shall begin with the dawning of a new century, as the sun of the Empire was about to set and the crescent of Islamism was ascending...

Farish A. Noor
S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, RSIS
Nanyang Technological University
September 2013

1 1951-1969: The Orphan of the Cold War

An Islamic Party Steps on the Stage of Malaysian Politics

> When PAS was born, it emerged into a world where not all around it were happy with its coming. From its early days it was brought up in an environment where it felt life's harshest blows. That was PAS, as it took its first steps when this country approached its independence ...[1]
>
> Bachtiar Djamily, *Kenapa PAS Boleh Jadi PAS?*

Islamism Ascending: How and Why Political Islam Emerged in the World of Malayan Politics

That the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party, or PAS, would develop into the biggest and strongest opposition party in postcolonial Malaysia was neither a fact that was predetermined nor necessary, though it happens to be a reality today. How this happened is the subject of this book, and in the course of charting PAS's complex and convoluted story, I chart the history of Malaysia as well.

Much has already been written about the arrival of Islam to what would later be called the nation-state of Malaysia, and many authors have dwelled on the theme of Islamisation as it developed over the course of several centuries.[2] By the time that Southeast Asia experienced the impact of

1 Bachtiar Djamily, *Kenapa PAS Boleh Jadi PAS?,* Petaling Jaya: Cerma Rafleswaty, 1976, p. 7.

2 For further elucidation and analysis of the subject, refer to the following sources: On Islam's early arrival in the Malay world, see S.Q. Fatimi, *Islam Comes to Malaysia*, Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1963; Syed Naquib Al-Attas, *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago*, Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1963; S. Hussein Alatas, 'On the Need for a Historical Study of Malaysian Islamisation', *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 4(3) (1963); and Russell Jones, 'Ten Conversion Myths from Indonesia', in Nehemia Levtzion (ed.), *Conversion to Islam*, London: Holmes and Meier, 1979. On the topic of contemporary developments in the Malay-Muslim world,see Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti Press, 1987; Sharon Siddique, 'Conceptualising Contemporary Islam: Religion of Ideology?', in Ahmad Ibrahim, Yasmin Hussain and Sharon Siddique (eds.), *Readings on Islam and Society in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 1985; Judith Nagata, *The Reflowering of Malaysian Islam*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984. For a comparative approach which situates Islamic resurgence in Malaysia within a global context, see Chandra Muzaffar, 'Islamic Resurgence: A Global View', in Taufik Abdullah and Sharon Siddique (eds.), *Islam and Society in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies, 1986. For an insight into the ideas and philosophy of one of the foremost Islamists and defenders of Islamisation in Malaysia, see Syed Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, Kuala Lumpur: Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, 1978.

colonial-capitalism in the 18th century, there were already native polities that were Malay-Muslim in character, and where Islam had furnished the indigenous populations of the region with their own vocabularies and epistemologies of power, authority and governance.[3] That the native polities of both mainland and maritime Southeast Asia were already sovereign states with their own understandings of authority and territoriality did not, however, forestall the spirit of imperial adventurism that propelled the Western powers eastwards, and by the 19th century almost every Southeast Asian kingdom had come under the sway of the British, Dutch, French, Spanish and, finally, the Americans.[4]

In time, the native communities of Southeast Asia rose up against the Western colonial powers, and their resistance was often couched in terms of a local vocabulary of rights and entitlements, with ideas borrowed from the repertoire of the natives' religions: In British Burma, Burmese nationalism developed in tandem with politicised Buddhism; in the same way that Indian nationalism also found some inspiration in the discourse of Hinduism, among others. It came as no surprise, therefore, that anti-British, anti-Dutch and anti-Spanish nationalism in British Malaya, the Dutch East Indies and Spanish Philippines was deeply marked by Islam, that held sway among the native populations of the colonies. In the Dutch East Indies, resistance to colonial rule was often framed in Islamic terms as part of the Muslims' jihad against infidel oppressors. From the militant fervour of leaders such as Pangeran Diponegoro of the Java War (1825-30) to the fanatical zeal of the hajis of the Minangkabau Padri Wars (1821-38); from the sporadic Muslim peasants' revolts of Banten in 1888 to the organised modernist Islamic economic and political movements at the end of the 19th century, Indonesian Islam offered formidable resistance to the colonising forces of the Dutch.

A similar development could be seen in the rise of political Islam in British Malaya: Islam-inspired resistance among the Malays can be dated back to Sultan Ahmad of Kedah's efforts in the 19th century to rally his forces against the British which took on the character of a holy war against a

3 For a comprehensive view of the differences in the development of Islam in Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and other Southeast Asia countries during and after the era of colonialism, see Robert Hefner and Patricia Horvatich (eds.), *Islam in an Era of Nation-States*, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1997.

4 William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions since World War II*, Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1995, p. 39.

colonial regime that was not only foreign, but also infidel.[5] Keenly aware of Islam's potential as a discourse of resistance – notably after Britain's colonial disasters in India, Afghanistan and Africa – the British colonial authorities in Malaya were careful not to incite a religio-political backlash from the Malay-Muslims whose power and territories they were impinging upon. The treaties that were signed between the British and the Malay rulers (such as the Pangkor Treaty of 1874 and the Pahang Treaty of 1888) introduced a neat division between matters of governance (which the British assumed as their prerogative) and matters of religion (which were left to the Malay rulers). The net result of these treaties, lopsided as they were, was the first artificial division between state and religion that had no precedent in Malay-Muslim politics since the 13th century.

British intervention into the Malay states was carried out slowly and in stages: first through the creation of the Straits Settlements (SS) in 1826, then the formation of the Federated Malay States (FMS) in 1896 and, finally, the Unfederated Malay States (UMS) in 1909. In 1867, control of the Straits Settlements was passed to the Colonial Office in London. Having divided the Malay world into two, the British colonial functionaries began to concentrate on the practical needs and demands of managing their colony. Most of their time and energy went into development programmes designed to create a lopsided import-substitution economy typical of most colonial dependencies. Islam and Malay beliefs and customs were relegated to secondary concerns and left in the hands of traditional Malay sultans and ulama who ran the religious bureaucracy. By 1904, no Malay-Muslim living in the 'protected' Malay Sultanates was allowed to teach or lecture on the subject of Islam outside his own home without written permission from the sultan himself – who was, in turn, under the 'guidance' of the colonial advisor posted at his court. By 1925, this restriction had been extended to the field of printing and publishing.[6] Islam, by virtue of being cut off from real political power, had thus become narrowed as a result, and reduced to the level of ceremony and symbols.

For the Malay-Muslims, the realities of colonial rule meant that military and economic power were in the hands of the British, while ceremonial and symbolic power was in the hands of their rulers. Islam had been divorced from politics, and had no effective means to serve as a discourse

5 Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, London: Macmillan, 1982, p. 119.

6 Alijah Gordon (ed.), *The Real Cry of Syed Shaykh al-Hady*, Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1999, p. xiii.

of governance and identity formation. The recognition of the relative powerlessness of Muslims in the face of the colonial hegemon was therefore one of the primary factors that guided the Islamist enterprise from the outset; and it began with the call to reunite the domains of the political and the religious, as an effort to remember the broken body politic of the Malay-Muslim world. Long before the Islamist party PAS appeared on the scene, the task of revitalising the Malay-Muslim community was left to the younger generation of Muslim activist-intellectuals in Malaya, and theirs was a generational struggle between the younger voices for change and the older voices of conservatism.

The *Kaum Muda* Challenge: Islamist Activism as the Precedent to Islamist Politics

Political Islam did not mysteriously appear out of nowhere, like a genie released from a bottle. In British Malaya, as was the case in the Dutch East Indies and British India, political Islam's emergence was set against a broader context of local activism where native intellectuals grappled with the facts of colonial rule and the loss of indigenous power.

Ironically, the first generation of Malayan and Indonesian Muslim activists were themselves the indirect by-products of Western colonial governance. Many of them were the graduates of modern religious schools that were inspired by the secular schools built by the colonisers, and many of them happened to be urban-based intellectuals and professionals whose own careers and livelihoods were dependent upon the new social spaces and communicative infrastructure that had been laid down via the expansion and projection of colonial power. These urban Muslim activists and intellectuals availed themselves of the wonders of Western technology – from the telegraph to the steamship – and were part of a wider, interconnected Asia that had come under the protective umbrella of colonial power and policing. Unlike their Westernised and secularised counterparts, however, they used the communicative infrastructure of the Empire in order to connect with other parts of the imperial domain, only to meet up with other colonised Muslims abroad who, in turn, inspired their own local struggles; men such as Jamaluddin al-Afgani and Muhammad Abduh became their role models.

In British Malaya and the East Indies, the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th witnessed the birth of a plethora of new Muslim co-operatives, study circles and intellectual groups: in 1908, the *Budi Otomo* (Noble Endeavour) movement was formed by Dr. Waidin Sudira

Usada and a group of prominent Javanese intellectuals, merchants and community leaders. In 1911, the *Sarekat Islam* (Islamic Co-operative) movement was begun by Haji Omar Said Tjokroaminoto (the future father-in-law of Sukarno) and Haji Agoes Salim. (The *Sarekat Dagang Islam* eventually opened branches in the Malay Peninsula.[7]) In 1912, the *Muhamadijah*, a modernist and reformist Muslim organisation, was founded by Kyai Haji Dahlan. The conservative-traditionalists followed suit by forming their own organisation, *Nahdatul Ulama* (NU) in 1926, which was led by Kyai Hashim Asyari of Surabaya. The rapid emergence and rise of these Islamist movements reflected the growing concern among Muslims of the Dutch East Indies that they were being marginalised in the economic, political and cultural fields in their own homeland. The fear of being swamped and overtaken by both European and Chinese political and business interests was a key factor in the mobilisation of Indonesian Muslims in the early 20th century.

Similar religio-communal concerns guided the actions of Malay, Indian and Arab Muslim activists in British Malaya at the time, who felt that the British 'plural economy' (quoting Furnivall's phrase[8]) was one that had marginalised the Muslims of the land. As the British colonial authorities encouraged hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from China and India to come and work in the colony, the Malay-Muslim character of the Malay polities was being visibly altered. By the first decade of the 20th century, the urban landscape of towns like Georgetown, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore were no longer Malay-Muslim, but increasingly cosmopolitan. Compounding the problem of ethnic division was the sustained prejudice that the Malay-Muslims were the 'lazy natives' of Asia, who had to be brought to heel under benevolent colonial guidance.[9]

By the turn of the century the contradictions in the Malayan colonial model had become so evident that even the British colonial authorities could no longer afford to turn a blind eye to the crisis they had unwittingly engineered. The colonial census of 1911 revealed that the Malay-Muslims

7 Abdullah Zakaria Ghazali, 'Sarekat Islam di Trengganu', *Malaysia in History*, XX(11), 1972.

8 J. S. Furnivall, *An Introduction to the Political Economy of Burma*. Rangoon: Burma Book Club, 1931.

9 The phrase 'myth of the lazy native' comes from the work by Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native: A Study of the Image of the Malays, Filipinos and Javanese from the 16th to the 20th Century and its Function in the Ideology of Colonial Capitalism*, London: Frank Cass, 1977. This is undoubtedly the most thorough and substantial study into the ways and means by which the imperial ideology of colonial-capitalism constructed an image of a deficient and disabled native *Other* to justify and rationalise the introduction of colonial rule into Malaya.

were on the verge of becoming a minority in their own country, as a result of the unregulated influx of Asian migrants. Moves were made to reverse the situation, but the Aliens Ordinance only came into effect in 1933. (By then the Malays were already a minority, making up 49 per cent of the population.) Under such conditions, the Malays became increasingly agitated about their own fate. The challenge of social reform and political mobilisation was seized by the new generation of Malay reformers and modernists who came to be known as *Kaum Muda* (The Younger Generation).

The *Kaum Muda* reformers were mostly Malay, Indian and Arab (*Peranakan*) Muslims who had settled in Malaya for generations and who had grown up in the British colonial settlements of Penang, Malacca and Singapore. The inheritors of a different intellectual tradition that went back to the time of Munshi Abdullah Abdul Kadir, they viewed the condition of the Malays in the Malay sultanates from a radically different perspective. They were shaped by the values and lifestyle of a modern, cosmopolitan mercantile community where economic and political success was the key to survival. Among the influential figures of the *Kaum Muda* were Sumatra-born Sheikh Mohamad Tahir Jalaludin al-Azhari and the Malaccan-born Syed Sheikh Ahmad al-Hadi. Both were regarded as representatives of the *Kaum Muda* generation and they were very attracted to the reformist and modernist ideas then in vogue in the Muslim world.

From the outset it should be noted that cosmopolitanism and internationalism were the hallmarks of political Islam in the modern age: The young reformers of Malaya were men who had travelled to the Arab lands and studied in Mecca and Cairo.[10] Despite their objection to colonial rule, men like Sheikh Mohamad and Syed Sheikh al-Hadi were not adverse to taking full advantage of the communicative infrastructure of Empire; if Western gunboats could project imperial power to the most isolated parts of Asia, then Western steamships could also transport anti-colonial activists to other hotbeds of anti-colonial agitation too. (By then the journey from Singapore to Cairo took only two weeks.) With other prominent Malay-Muslim reformers such as Sheikh Muhammad Basyuni Imran of Sambas, these reform-minded Islamists studied with Malay-Muslim ulama and scholars already based in Mecca (such as Sheikh Umar al-Sumbawi, Sheikh Uthman al-Sarawaki and Sheikh Mohammad Khatib al-Minangkabawi) as well as modern reformist thinkers like the Egyptian scholar and disciple of Abduh, Rashid Rida.

10 Sheikh Mohamad Tahir Jalaludin al-Azhari was born at Bukit Tinggi, West Sumatra in 1869, but later spent twelve years studying in Mecca and then later at Al-Azhar in Cairo.

Through Sheikh Mohamad Tahir, the radical ideas and methods of the new generation of Muslim thinkers like Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida were introduced to the Malay-Muslims of the peninsula. On 23 July 1906, Sheikh Mohamad Tahir established his own reformist magazine *al-Imam* (*The Leader*), modelled on the reformist publication *al-Manar* (*The Beacon*) published in Cairo by Rida. Sheikh Mohamad Tahir's work was taken up by Syed Sheikh al-Hadi, who was both a prolific writer and founder of numerous modern reformist madrasah all over the peninsula. During his lifetime, Syed Sheikh al-Hadi[11] was regarded as the *'Khalifa Kaum Muda'* (leader of the younger generation) by his conservative-traditionalist critics. He was particularly interested in reforming the institution of the madrasah and pondok school systems, for he believed that *modern* Islamic education was the key to solving many of the problems facing the Muslims. Syed Sheikh al-Hadi was aided in this task by other Malay-Muslim reformers such as Haji Abbas Mohamad Tahar and the Acehnese Sheikh Mohamad Salim al-Kalili, as well as prominent Arab and Indian Muslim reformers, including Shaykh Abu Jabir Abdullah al-Ghadamisi.

By the 1920s, the combined efforts of the reformists in British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies had created a virtual community of letters and journals that was connected via the commercial networks of the British and Dutch colonies; colonial commercial centres like Georgetown (Penang), Malacca, Singapore, Batavia, Surabaya and Medan were the key stations in the new map of Malay-Muslim intellectualism and activism across maritime Southeast Asia. Despite the vigour and energy of the younger reformists and intellectuals, however, it could not be denied that the *Kaum Muda* themselves were a hybrid and complex group that suffered their own internal contradictions. Firstly, it has to be noted from the outset that the

11 Syed Sheikh Ahmad al-Hadi was born on 22 November 1867 in Kampung Hulu, Malacca. His mother was Malay while his father, Syed Ahmad ibn Hasan ibn Saqaf al-Hady al-Ba'alawi, was a Peranakan Arab of Hadrami descent. On 4 February 1908, he opened Madrasah al-Iqbal al-Islamiyyah in Singapore. In 1919, he moved to Penang to open Madrasah al-Mashoor, which became perhaps one of the most famous of the radical 'reformist' madrasah of the colonial era. Together with other radical new reformist madrasah such as Madrasah al-Hadi of Malacca, Madrasah al-Iqbal al-Islamiyyah of Singapore and Madrasah Ma'ahad al-Ehya as-Sharif of Gunung Semanggul, Madrasah al-Mashoor was instrumental in educating young reformist Muslim thinkers and activists such as Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy. In 1927, Syed Sheikh al-Hadi left the teaching profession and opened the Jelutong Press in Penang, which became one of the leading reformist publishing houses. The press published his own translation of the Quranic exegesis (*tafsir*) of Muhammad Abduh as well as many other important reformist articles and books. (Re: Alijah Gordon (ed.), *The Real Cry of Syed Shaykh al-Hady*; Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*.)

Islamist intellectuals then were liminal subjects who were seen as marginal in their own communities – they were often urban-based intellectuals who lived directly under colonial law and were governed as colonial subjects. Secondly, their mixed ethnic background (many came from mixed ethnic marriages themselves) meant that the more traditional-minded Malays and Javanese did not regard them as truly 'native'. Thirdly, in their appeal for the modernisation, renewal and rejuvenation of the Muslim spirit, it could be seen that they, too, were enamoured by the claims of Modernity, which was concretely expressed in the structure of colonial-capitalist rule. Notwithstanding these contradictions and complications, the *Kaum Muda* had succeeded in preparing the discursive ground for Malay-Muslim activism in the decades to come. By turning to Islam for inspiration, they had demonstrated that Islam was not necessarily the cause of Muslim backwardness, but could perhaps be its solution instead. Islam had, as a result, become a discourse for political mobilisation and resistance.

These efforts eventually bore fruit in the form of the first Malay-Muslim political associations in the colony; in 1926, the first Malay-Muslim political organisation, the *Kesatuan Melayu Singapura* (KMS) (Malay Union of Singapore) was formed at the *istana* (or palace) of Kampung Gelam, Singapore, which was once the seat of the royal capital of the Johor-Riau Sultanate.[12] The KMS was formed at a time when the Malay and *Peranakan* Muslims felt that the entire Muslim world was on the verge of a major political crisis, as a result of the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate in 1924. In the wake of the Caliphate crisis, the Malay world witnessed a number of novel developments. The 'fever of nationalism' caught the imagination of Malays throughout the archipelago. In the Dutch East Indies, nationalist leader Sukarno founded the *Partai Nasionalis Indonesia* (PNI) (Nationalist Party of Indonesia) in 1927. Shortly thereafter, the PNI rapidly became a major political force and soon also gained a loyal following among the nationalists in British Malaya as well. The Indonesian Islamists were not to be outdone. In 1937, the biggest Muslim organisations in Indonesia – Muhamadijah, Sarekat Islam and Nahdatul Ulama – came together to form the *Madjlis Islam A'laa Indonesia* (MIAI).

In British Malaya, the Malay-Muslims began forming various social, economic and political organisations to mobilise themselves. Branches of the KMS were formed in Penang and Malacca. The *Persatuan Melayu Perak* was formed in 1937, and in 1938 other organisations were launched in Pahang, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan. The *Persatuan Melayu Johor* was

12 Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, pp. 190-195.

set up in 1939. Most of these organisations were formed with the specific intention of promoting greater Malay-Muslim participation in politics and economics and to defend the position of the Malays *vis-à-vis* the non-Malay communities in the country.[13]

The rise of political Islam in British Malaya between the 1920s and 1930s was not a singular development, though, for while the Malay-Muslims were coming together to cobble a religiously inspired political discourse of their own, parallel developments were taking place among the other non-Muslim communities in the colony: the South Seas Communist Party (SSCP) was formed in Singapore in 1928, the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) in 1930[14] and the Malayan General Labour Union (MGLU) in 1934.[15]

It would also be misleading to suggest that all Malay, Indian and Arab Muslims in British Malaya were attracted to political Islam as a discourse of resistance against colonial rule. In 1938, the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (Young Malays Association, KMM) was formed by a group of young Malay radical nationalists, including Ibrahim Yaakob (its president),[16] Onan Haji Siraj (vice-president), Abdul Karim Rashid (secretary), Ishak Haji Muhammad,

13 The first Pan-Malayan meeting of associations was held in Kuala Lumpur on 5-6 August 1939, at the initiative of the Selangor and Singapore associations. The meeting discussed the need to further strengthen the associations and the objective of helping the Malays in their economic development. A second Pan-Malayan meeting was held in Singapore on 25-26 December 1940.

14 The MCP was officially launched on 30 April 1930 at Buloh Kasap in Johor. The date of its official launch was postponed by one day due to the heavy presence of British Malayan Security Service (MSS) operatives around the original launch venue (Kampung Dioh near Kuala Pilah, Negeri Sembilan). Despite the secrecy surrounding the event, the launch was witnessed by at least one important communist leader destined to play an important role in the communist struggle in Southeast Asia: Quyen Ai Quoc, otherwise known as Ho Chi Minh – who stood as the Eastern representative of the COMINTERN at the time.

15 Hua Wu Yin, *Class and Communalism in Malaysia*, London: Zed Books, 1983, p. 63.

16 The secular Malay nationalist Ibrahim Yaakob was born in Temerloh, Pahang, in 1911. His early education was at the Sultan Idris Training College, established by the British to develop a new generation of Malay teachers for the local vernacular schools they had set up. He eventually turned against the colonial establishment and entered the world of Malay journalism; he rose to become the editor of *Majlis*, a Malay newspaper. KMM was an underground movement that tried to bring down the colonial establishment from within. Its leaders were inspired by, and co-operated with, both the radical nationalists of Indonesia and later the Japanese military authorities during the Second World War. The Japanese promoted Ibrahim to the rank of commander-in-chief of the local Malay militia, PETA (*Pembela Tanah Air*). After the war, he was forced to flee to Indonesia, where he used the assumed name of Iskandar Kamel Agastja. He helped to co-ordinate anti-Malayan activities of the radical Malay nationalist party (PKMM) in exile. He never returned to Malaya, and died in Indonesia. His writings included *Melihat Tanah Air* (1941), and *Sedjarah dan Perdjuangan di Malaya* (1948). The latter, written in exile, was published under his assumed name.

Ahmad Boestaman, and Sultan Djenain, who served as the link between the KMM and MCP. The KMM was the first expression of a relatively secular, left-leaning form of Malay nationalism in Malaya; and though all its Malay members were Muslims, the KMM's political objectives were aimed at Malayan nationalism in secular terms. The KMM's aim was to struggle for independence and to work towards closer links with the Malay peoples of Indonesia. Men like Ibrahim Yaakob and Burhanuddin al-Helmy envisaged the eventual creation of a vast Malay bloc that they called *Malaya-Raya*, encompassing the Malay Peninsula, Dutch East Indies, Borneo and the Philippines. In 1939, another important leader joined the KMM, Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, who we shall see later would play a crucial role in the development of left-leaning Islamist politics in Malaysia from the 1950s to 1969.

By 1939, the discursive landscape of British Malaya was therefore a complex one, with a range of competing political discourses vying for influence and hegemony. The dominant discourse of Western colonial capitalism still held sway as a result of its control over the state apparatus and the means of reproduction and dissemination, but it was clear that among the colonised native subjects of Malaya the monological worldview of the colonial power was no longer unchallenged. What was needed was a radical break that would lay bare the antagonism between these divergent and irreconcilable world views, which finally happened with the advent of the Second World War and the arrival of the Japanese imperial army.

Competing Discourses during the Japanese Military Occupation of Malaya

The sinking of the British warships HMS *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales* by the Japanese air force was more than a symbolic gesture of sending a few thousand tons of steel to the bottom of the ocean; it demonstrated, in no uncertain terms, that the imposing structures of colonial power and rule could be dismantled in a matter of seconds.[17] The subsequent Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia totally destroyed the institutional and political

17 A major reason for the poor performance of the Allied forces during the defence of Malaya was the lack of air cover. In his account of the conflict, General A. E. Percival, then GOC in Malaya, bemoaned the lack of fighter planes to check the rapid Japanese advance from the north. (Re: A.E. Percival, *The War in Malaya*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1949.)

structures of Western colonial control, and it also opened the way for a host of competing native discourses to emerge.

At this stage in Malayan history, the discursive landscape of the numerous anti-colonial forces could be summed up as belonging to three discursive communities: the secular non-Malay leftists, the secular Malay leftists and the Islamists. The Japanese were careful to co-opt the various groups and impose their own brand of divide-and-rule politics to maintain and reproduce their power.

The group that was most harshly dealt with were the non-Malay (predominantly Chinese) leftists whose own Communist politics was anathema to the Japanese military establishment. Throughout Japan's occupation of Malaya, the East Indies, Burma, Vietnam and other parts of the region, the Chinese migrant community was singled out for harsh treatment. The Malayan Communists, in turn, opposed the Japanese with the same commitment that they opposed Western colonial rule, culminating in the formation of the MCP-backed Malayan Peoples' Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) that carried out a sustained guerilla war in the jungles.[18] The MPAJA was aided by a clandestine network of Chinese associations, the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Union (MPAJU).[19]

While discriminating against the Chinese, the Japanese military authorities began promoting the development of the radical Malay nationalists in their efforts to win the confidence of the Malays. The Malay radicals were courted by the Japanese administration and invited to play a prominent role in the development of Malay civic and paramilitary organisations that the Japanese hoped to use in order to reinforce their power in Malaya. Ibrahim Yaakob and the other ex-KMM leaders such as Ahmad Boestaman were invited to lead the Japanese-sponsored native militias and armed forces, the *Giyugun* and *Giyutai*. In late July 1945, under the watchful eye of the Japanese military command, the Malay radicals were given the chance to form the *Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung* (KRIS) (Union of Indonesian and Peninsular Malay Peoples) under the leadership of Dr. Burhanuddin

18 During the war, MCP guerrillas trained by British army officers fought and worked alongside other forces such as Force 136 and the Malay militias. The MCP organised its own militia, the MPAJA; the 1st regiment of MPAJA was established at Serendah, Selangor on 1 February 1942.

19 Kumar Ramakrishna, 'The Making of a Malayan Propagandist: The Communists, the British and C.C. Too', *JMBRAS*, LXXIII(1) (2000), p. 71. MPAJA received its weapons and training from British troops working covertly in Malaya. MPAJU was used as the main channel to deliver weapons and supplies to the guerrillas in the jungle.

al-Helmy.[20] KRIS contained a number of ex-KMM members, though it also attracted the support of less radical nationalists such as Dato' Onn Jaafar and Malay ruler Sultan Abdul Aziz of Perak. The nationalists' dream seemed to be within arm's reach when Ibrahim Yaakob and Dr. Burhanuddin met Indonesian leaders Sukarno and Hatta while the latter were in Taiping, Perak on 12 August.[21] But this short-lived project was the closest that the Malay radicals ever got to establishing their cherished goal of reunification and independence for the entire Indonesian-Malayan peoples.

While the radical Malay nationalists were given a chance to play a more active public role during the Japanese occupation, the same could not be said of the Malayan Islamists. During the Japanese military occupation of Malaya and the East Indies, the development of political Islam was comparatively slow. Although Japan had tried to court the support of Islamist movements and organisations in the Malay world throughout the 1930s,[22] only in December 1944 did the Japanese military authorities organise the Pan-Malayan Religious Council at Kuala Kangsar, Perak's royal capital, as part of their attempt to control the religious bureaucracy in the Malay states. In the former Dutch colony of the East Indies, the Japanese courted the support of both the traditionalists (from movements like the *Nahdatul Ulama*) and reformists (from movements such as the *Muhamadijah*). During the period of Japanese rule, the *Majlis Shura Muslimin* (*Masjumi*) was formed to bring together the diverse traditionalist and modernist-reformist strands of Islam in the country. *Masjumi* eventually came under the leadership of prominent Islamist thinker Muhammad Natsir.

The Japanese also sponsored the creation of Islamist militias such as *Hizbullah* in their attempt to build up a local defence force to help them in the event of a Western counter-attack in Indonesia.[23] Like the PETA militia, *Hizbullah* troops were given training in the use of arms and furnished

20 Other interpretations of the acronym KRIS included *Kesatuan Rakyat Istimewa* (Special People's Union) and – by those who felt KRIS was a serious attempt to bring about a union between Malaya and Indonesia – *Kerajaan Rakyat Indonesia Semenanjung* (Government of the Peoples of the Peninsula and Indonesia). (Re: William Roff, in Ahmad Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, p. xxxi.)

21 Ibid., p. xvi.

22 The Japanese government had been trying to court support from Muslim groups and movements outside Japan since the 1930s. (Re: Martin Kramer, *Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congress*, Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1986, pp. 155-156.)

23 At its peak, the *Hizbullah* militia in the Japanese East Indies had 50,000 armed troops who were drilled and given rudimentary military training and weapons. Although much smaller than the *Keibodan* civil defence corps that had about 1,300,000 men, it was nonetheless a significant fighting force.

with weapons. At the end of the war, the Japanese left behind a number of organised Islamist bodies and militias that later took part in the anti-Dutch war of Indonesian independence of 1945.[24] Movements like *Masjumi, Nahdatul Ulama* and *Muhamadijjah* subsequently played a greater role in the independence struggle.

Despite the difference in how the Japanese treated the Malayans and Indonesians, the close links between the peoples of the archipelago could not be denied. Many Malayan radical nationalists and Islamists maintained contact with the Indonesian Islamists and nationalist movements. Osman Abdullah, for instance (one of the first to join PAS in 1951) had studied at the Islamic University of Padang in Indonesia. During the Japanese occupation of Indonesia, he joined the Japanese-sponsored *Hizbullah* militia and later took part in the war against the Dutch. Mohamad Dahari Mohamad Ali, another Malay radical who had helped to form KMM, served as a staff officer in the Sumatran Command of the Indonesian national army between 1946 and 1948.[25]

On 13 August 1945, the Japanese occupation of Malaya and the East Indies finally came to an end. After three years of Japanese occupation, the Indonesians were given the opportunity to develop armed militias of their own that were more than ready to meet the returning Dutch. On 17 August 1945, Sukarno and Muhammad Hatta proclaimed the nation's independence. This was echoed on 2 September by Vietnam's declaration of independence by communist leader Ho Chi Minh who was equally determined to ensure that France would never again gain control of his country. In Burma, the Burmese militias – comprising nationalists, socialists, communists and Buddhist activists – were also preparing themselves for the inevitable fight with their ex-colonial masters. Their independence was won three years later, in 1948.

But in Malaya, the hour of the Islamists had yet to arrive. During the closing stages of the war, the only Malay-Muslim groupings that came to the fore were a handful of loosely organised militias and Islamic-oriented millenarian-inclined *silat* (martial arts) cult groups called the *Sabilillah* movement, whose main interest was in protecting their communities from the incursion of the Chinese communists of the MPAJA. The warriors of the

24 For a comprehensive account of the role played by the various Islamist movements of Indonesia in the lead-up to the war of independence and beyond, *see* Harry J. Benda, *The Crescent and the Rising Sun: Indonesian Islam under Japanese Occupation 1942-1945*, Leiden: Fouris, 1983 (orig. publ. 1958).

25 Ahmad Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, p. 9 fn. 2.

Sabilillah movement engaged in sporadic raids against Chinese settlements thought to be sympathetic to the communists and were responsible for many brutal revenge killings in retaliation for the atrocities committed by the communists against Malay villagers and officials. Most of the violence was centred around west Johor and in settlements along the Perak River. In Johor, many of the *Sabilillah* fighters were led by Kyai Che Muhammad Saleh Abdul Karim, the *penghulu* of Mukim Empat near Batu Pahat. Despite its militant tenor, the *Sabilillah* movement remained dispersed, poorly led and ill-disciplined; it never developed into an organised body and, in time, it was disbanded by the British colonial authorities. Radical Malay-Muslim nationalism only took off with the formation of the *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* (Malay Nationalist Party of Malaya, PKMM) that would come later.

The First Expression of Malay-Muslim Nationalism: *The Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya*

The first radical Malay nationalist party, *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* (PKMM), was formed two days after the end of Japanese rule, on 17 August 1945 (the same day that Indonesia declared its independence). The PKMM's principal founders were a number of radical Malay nationalists, including Mokhtaruddin Lasso (formerly of the MCP), Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Ishak Haji Muhammad, Ahmad Boestaman, Ibrahim Mohamad, Aishah Ghani, Shamsiah Fakeh and the radical Ustaz Sheikh Abu Bakar al-Bakir. The party also attracted Islamist activists such as Ustaz Baharuddin Abdul Latif. [26]

The PKMM's first president was Mokhtaruddin Lasso, who was thought to have links with Indonesian nationalist movements as well as the Communists in Malaya. Its second president was Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, an Aligarh-educated radical Islamist-nationalist who later became the third president of PAS. The PKMM had its own youth wing, the *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf* (API) led by Ahmad Boestaman. Its women's wing, *Angkatan Wanita Sedar* (AWAS) was first led by Aishah Ghani and later by Shamsiah Fakeh. It also formed a farmers/peasants wing, *Barisan Tani Sa-Malaya* (BATAS). The party produced its own newsletter, *Penyedar*, that dealt with social and

26 For a historical summary of the achievements of the radical Malay nationalists during this period, see Burhanuddin al-Helmy, *Perjuangan Kita: 17 Ogos 1945 hingga 17 Ogos 1946*, Singapore: PKMM, 1946.

political issues. One of the editors of *Penyedar* was Mohammad Asri Muda (who would later become the fourth president of PAS). That two future presidents of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party began their political careers in the PKMM suggests the extent to which the concerns of the left-leaning nationalists and Islamists overlapped then.

In November 1945, the PKMM organised its first national congress, during which it adopted the slogan '*Merdeka*' (Independence), the *Sang Saka Merah-Putih* (red and white) flag of the Indonesian nationalists and the song *Indonesia Raya* as its party anthem. The PKMM soon became the main political vehicle for *both* Malay secular and Islamist nationalists calling for immediate independence from British rule. Prominent Malay-Muslim leaders added their support to the PKMM during the initial stages; one of them, Kelantanese *ulama* Maulana Abdullah Noh, even went as far as declaring the PKMM's struggle against the British colonial authorities part of the compulsory jihad against 'infidel oppressors' (*penjajah kafir*).[27] Many radical nationalists who joined PKMM were also inspired by the revolutionary nationalism of Sukarno and the Indonesians. They called for closer ties with Indonesia while dreaming of the creation of a pan-Malay political alliance that would unite Malaya, Indonesia and the other Malay-dominated regions of the archipelago under the heading of *Malaya-Raya* (Greater Malaya).

The fact that the PKMM managed to bring together Malay-Muslims of both the secular leftist and Islamist tendency suggests that even as late as 1945 the discursive boundary between the two groups had yet to solidify. This also points to the availability of both leftist and Islamist discourses at the time, at a point when the state of antagonism and undecidability in the country had yet to be contained in the wake of the war. At a time when it was still evident that colonial power was more fragile than previously assumed, and when the native opposition groups had yet to coalesce into solid political entities with identifiable characters, this state of flux was one of productive ambiguity, where local Malayan nationalists were selectively appropriating signifiers and symbols from a wide array of discursive registers: leftist, nationalist and Islamist at the same time.

The colonial authorities, in turn, were deeply worried about the rise of the PKMM and perplexed by its hybrid, composite nature; reports were

27 Maulana Abdullah Noh was a strong supporter of the PKMM in its early stages, partly because the Islamists did not have a political organisation of their own. He wrote a tract entitled *Semangat Perajurit-Perajurit Muslimin* (The Spirit of Muslim Warriors) in which he called on the Malays to forcefully resist the colonial government (*PAS dalam Arus Perjuangan Kemerdekaan*, p. 4).

being sent back to London about the rise of a range of movements with odd affiliations. The British HQ Malaya Command report of 1946 (entitled 'Communal Violence and Political Militancy in Malaya') observed that, by 1946, Malacca had become the base for an anti-British 'holy war' movement whose members came from both local Malay-Muslim *silat* associations and Ahmad Boestaman's API movement that was part of the PKMM, for instance.[28]

While the British were trying to re-establish rule in Malaya and contain the rise of these new hybrid groupings, efforts were being undertaken to seal the fate of British Malaya as a colony at the same time. By 22 January 1946, the white paper entitled 'The Malayan Union and Singapore' was ready and the British were prepared to turn the country into a full-fledged colony again. Sir Harold MacMichael was sent from London to secure the support of the Malay rulers. When news of the Malayan Union proposal was made public, the Malay-Muslim organisations were livid. Many Malay organisations were keen to form a pan-Malayan Malay movement to halt the Malayan Union project.

The first Malay Congress was held at the Sultan Sulaiman Club in Kuala Lumpur on 1-4 March 1946. The congress, opened by the Sultan of Selangor, was attended by 152 delegates from 41 Malay political organisations and societies from all sides of the political spectrum. The congress discussed the plan to form PEKEMBAR (*Persatuan Kebangsaan Melayu Bersatu*), but opted for the title UMNO (United Malays Nationalist Organisation) instead. A second Malay Congress, held on 11-12 May 1946 in Johor, was attended by 36 Malay organisations. On 11 May 1946, UMNO was officially launched at the Istana Besar in Johor Bahru. The first President was the Johorean aristocrat Dato' Onn Jaafar. The party executive committee included a number of prominent Malay aristocrats and nobles, including Dato' Nik Ahmad Kamil of Kelantan, Dato' Yassin Abdul Rahman of Johor, the Dato' Panglima Bukit Gantang of Perak, Dato' Haji Mohammad Noah, Syed Alwi Alhadi and other prominent feudal lords from Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang and Kedah. With so many feudal lords and aristocrats among its leaders, UMNO quickly developed a reputation as a conservative-traditionalist organisation.[29] During the second UMNO general assembly (29-30 June 1946), at Ipoh, the

28 A. J. Stockwell, *British Documents on the End of Empire: Malaya*, p. 245. Malaya Command Report 'Communal Violence and Political Militancy in Malaya', CO 537/1581. 22 June 1946. HQ Malaya High Command Intelligence Review no. 31.

29 Chandra Muzaffar, *Protector? An Analysis of the Concept and Practice of Loyalty in Leader-led Relationships within Malay Society*, Penang: Aliran, 1979, pp. 78-79.

left-wing Malay nationalists of PKMM left UMNO, after a heated dispute over the colours of UMNO's flag.[30]

Between 1946 to 1948, the Malay-Muslim movements were competing among themselves to be the first to offer a coherent discourse of nationalism that could bring together the demands and aspirations of the nationalists and Islamists of the Malay community. Then on 29 June 1946, UMNO's leaders presented their own proposals to the British and by 25 July 1946, the British had set up a working committee, which included both the sultans and representatives of UMNO, to discuss new arrangements for the country's future. These developments meant that the more radical leftists and Islamists would be left out of the negotiations for independence, and it was during this period that the more vocal opponents to British rule chose instead to work with the left-leaning unions and workers movements in the country. So strong were the Leftists then that, in October 1947, they organised the first nationwide strike that basically stopped the economy. The Islamists were still unsatisfied at that stage, however, for they were sandwiched between the radical left and the conservative right. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, then of PKMM, shared these concerns and felt there was a need to form a Muslim organisation to bring together the Islamist activists in the country.[31] It was this that led to the formation of the country's first Islamic party, the *Hizbul Muslimin*.

Political Islam before PAS: The Short-lived *Hizbul Muslimin* Party of Malaya

In March 1947, the PKMM, under the leadership of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, sponsored the first Pan-Malayan Islamic conference at the well-known madrasah Ma'ahad al-Ehya as-Sharif at Gunung Semanggul, Kedah.[32] The madrasah was run by Ustaz Sheikh Abu Bakar al-Bakir, another one of the PKMM's founders. The conference set out to address the economic problems faced by the Malay-Muslims and as a result of this conference, the *Majlis Agama Tertinggi* (Supreme Religious Council, MATA) of Malaya

30 The UMNO flag was finally raised during the third UMNO assembly in Penang on 27-28 July 1946.

31 Dr. Burhanuddin was later removed from the post of president of the PKMM during its congress meeting in December 1947, which took place at the *istana* of Kampung Gelam, Singapore. He was 'elevated' to the status of the chief advisor instead.

32 For an account of the history of the madrasah, see: Nabir Haji Abdullah, *Ma'ahad al-Ehya al-Sharif Gunung Semanggul, 1934-1959*, Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Press, 1976.

was created. The MATA conference on 13-16 March 1948 discussed both local and international issues of concern to the Malays. This reflected the internationalism and cosmopolitan outlook of some of its leaders such as Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Ustaz Abu Bakar. Among the international issues raised were Indonesia's ongoing war of independence against the Dutch, Siamese control and dominance over Patani, and the Palestinian crisis.[33] The conference participants also referred to the independence struggles of other Asian countries that had led to the independence of India and Pakistan (14 August 1947), Burma (4 January 1948), Ceylon (4 February 1948) and the withdrawal of British forces from Palestine. The question raised was why was Malaya still under British colonial rule when all the other countries had been given their freedom?

At the second MATA conference, the *Parti Orang Muslimin Malaya* (*Hizbul Muslimin*) was formed (on 17 March 1948). Its founders included Ustaz Abu Bakar al-Bakir (principal of Madrasah Ma'ahad al-Ehya as-Sharif), Ustaz Abdul Rab, Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Kyai Masyhur Azahari of the Indonesian Masjumi movement. Other Malay radical nationalists such as Mohammad Asri Muda, *Hizbul Muslimin*'s first secretary, also played a crucial role in its formation and activities. The party's flag was the red and white *Sang Saka Merah-Putih*, also adopted by the radicals of PKMM. The *Hizbul Muslimin's* first president was Ustaz Abu Bakar al-Bakir, its vice-president Ustaz Haji Arrifin Haji Awang and deputy president Ustaz Daud Kamil.[34] The party had eight departments to look after religious, educational, political, economic, social, youth, women's affairs and information. The party's objective was the struggle to create an independent Malaya founded upon Islamic principles and laws, but it also adopted the broad-based nationalist political outlook of PKMM.

However, the first Islamist party in Malaya was not destined to last long. While the radical nationalists grew more vocal in their calls for independence, the colonial authorities were in no mood to make a hasty exit. Apart from their worries about the Malayan Communists, the British authorities were also wary of the *Hizbul Muslimin*, fearing that its links with the left-wing Malay nationalists and the Islamic movements of Indonesia might make it a powerful force in Malay political circles. In a report entitled 'Effect of Action by Government in Malaya to Counteract Malayan Communist Party Plans', issued in August 1948, the Malayan Security Service claimed that the MCP had 'made a further approach to the Malays under the religious cloak of the Supreme Islamic Council and later the pseudo-political party

33 Nabir, *Ma'ahad al-Ehya al-Sharif Gunung Semanggul*, pp. 143-144.

34 Ibid., p. 171.

Hasbul Muslimin (sic)'.[35] Britain's fear of a Malayan Islamic-Communist alliance was perhaps understandable at the time, considering that the Indonesian Communists were also growing increasingly powerful, and that in the same year (1948) the Communist rebellion in Madiun, East Java, had broken out. *Hizbul Muslimin* had come into the world at a time when the Cold War was only beginning to get hotter, and when the fear of the Communist takeover of Southeast Asia was rife.

Matters finally came to a head in June 1948, when the British authorities declared a state of national emergency (which lasted until 1960) that was sparked off with the opening moves of 'Operation Frustration', aimed at the Malayan Communist Party and its supporters. The main target of the nationwide security sweep was the leadership of the MCP, and in the years that followed, the MCP bore the brunt of the attacks by the security forces of the state. The colonial authorities also moved decisively against *Hizbul Muslimin*. At the outset of the emergency, the colonial authorities arrested and detained the party's president, Ustaz Abu Bakar, and six other leaders: Ustaz Ar-Rab Tamimi (head of *Hizbul* propaganda), Ustaz Abdul Rauf Nur (*khatib* of Masjid Semanggul), Ustaz Abdul Wahab Nur, Mohamad Abas, Mohamad Nor Haji Mokhtar and Abdullah Hakim. These arrests badly affected the activities at the *Madrasah Ma'ahad*. At the same time, the British banned the PKMM and API, its radical youth wing. Many prominent radical leaders such as Ishak Haji Muhammad, Ahmad Boestaman and Khatijah Sidek were detained along with the Islamists. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy was one of the few who managed to evade detention. More than 12,000 activists and militants from the Communist, Socialist and Islamist camps were detained by the colonial authorities then.

By the end of 1948 there were hardly any anti-colonial parties and movements left in Malaya that could exist and operate legally. This meant that the only political party that was recognised, and which could negotiate with the British over terms for independence, was the UMNO party. The absence of a political party structure did not, however, mean that the discourse of political Islam had been eradicated, as well, for there remained those Malay-Muslims for whom the age-old struggle to repair the artificial division between religion and state was as alive then as it was in the 1920s and 1930s. What was needed was a new political vehicle that could embody and deliver the goals of the Islamists. Ironically, it turned out that the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party of the future would be formed in the womb of the UMNO party itself.

35 Stockwell, *British Documents on the End of Empire: Malaya*, p. 55. Malayan Security Service Political Intelligence Journal no. 15/48. 15 August 1948. CO 537/3753. No. 35. 15 August 1948.

Born from the Womb of UMNO: The Early Years of PAS as *Persatuan Islam Se-Malaya*

With the *Hizbul Muslimin* banned and its leaders behind bars, the Islamists of Malaya were without a party to call their own. From 1948 onwards the British authorities were less interested in the niceties of democracy and liberal governance, and more concerned about eliminating the potential threat of Communism from Malaya for good before they left their colony to its fate.

The eradication of the Malayan Communist Party was hardly a subtle affair. To counter the spread of the MCP, Lieutenant-General Harold Briggs, commander of the British forces and director of operations in Malaya, drew up the infamous 'Briggs Plan' which was designed to take the war to the Communists in the jungle. The Malaysian countryside was effectively divided into districts and quadrants which were policed and monitored by state security forces sent on notorious 'search and destroy' missions. Apart from the forceful detention, relocation and deportation of those thought to be communist sympathisers,[36] the colonial forces were also responsible for a number of atrocities committed in the heat of the fighting. (One of the most infamous incidents was the massacre of Chinese villagers in Batang Kali in December 1948.) In March 1951, the British set up the Emergency Information Services (EIS)[37] headed by Hugh Carleton Greene (brother of the novelist Graham Greene) and the Malayan propagandist C.C. Too[38] as part of the effort to break the morale of the MCP.

By then both the Malay conservatives and the British colonial establishment were worried about the spread of Communism across the archipelago, and the latest developments in Vietnam and Indonesia did little to allay their fears. The unintended beneficiaries of the crisis was the conservative leaders of the Chinese community who played on the insecurities of their community. In 1933, the British colonial authorities imposed tighter immigration controls on Chinese labour from abroad in an effort to ensure that the Malays would not be reduced to a minority in their own land. The lot of the Chinese community became worse in the wake of the war when large numbers of Chinese joined the MCP and left for the jungle to carry

36 The deportation of suspected members and sympathisers of the MCP began in earnest in 1950. The colonial authorities worked within the scope of the Emergency Regulations (clause 17C), and in 1950 alone 3,773 people were deported – 3,324 to China and 73 to India. The rest were sent to various other places.

37 Ramakrishna, 'The Making of a Malayan Propagandist', pp. 76-77.

38 Lim Cheng Leng, *The Story of a Psy-Warrior*, p. 74.

out a guerrilla war against the British armed forces. As a result, the Chinese found themselves doubly stigmatised, firstly as unwelcomed immigrants, and secondly as an internal security threat.

The Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) was formed on 27 February 1949 under the leadership of Tan Cheng Lock.[39] The MCA agreed to work with both the British and Malay conservative élite to help resolve the problems facing the country. Later, leaders of the conservative Malay and Chinese parties (UMNO and MCA) came together to form an instrumental coalition of their own, the UMNO-MCA Alliance. UMNO was then led by the aristocratic Western-educated leader Dato' Onn Jaafar and the movement was a broad, loose coalition of centre-right Malay-Muslim organisations.

Aware of how the party was seen by some of its detractors, UMNO was keen to promote itself as a defender of Islam and Muslim concerns as well as Malay rights. To that end, it sponsored the first meeting of ulama (*Perjumpaan Alim Ulama Tanah Melayu*) on 20-22 February 1950 at Bandar Maharani Muar, Johor. The purpose of the congress was to bring together Malay ulama from all over the country to discuss matters related to Muslim affairs, for the attention of the UMNO leadership. For a brief period, Dato' Onn had managed to secure the support of some ulama. UMNO's bureau of religious affairs, headed by Tuan Haji Ahmad Fuad, had managed to present the party as the only organisation able to translate the concerns and demands of the Malay-Muslims into concrete reality. The creation of this 'Islamist camp' within UMNO came at the time of the 'Nadrah Affair' (1950-51) which gave Islamists all over the country the opportunity to assume centre stage once again and to mobilise support from all sections of the Malay-Muslim community.[40]

The Nadrah affair could not have come at a worse time for the leaders of UMNO, who were then engaged in negotiations with the British over terms of Malaya's independence. The case revolved around the status of Nadrah, a Dutch girl left in the care of Malay foster-parents by her parents in the early stages of the Japanese occupation during the Second World War. The

39 Its first secretary was Yong Shook Lin, while Khoo Teck Ee served as treasurer. Other committee members included H.S. Lee as youth and women's committee chairman, Tan Siew Sin as publicity committee chairman and Leong Chong Leng as social welfare committee chairman. From 1950, the MCA operated a lottery to earn money to finance itself as well as its welfare policies directed towards the Chinese peasants who had been forcibly resettled. The party also submitted a memorandum to the British colonial authorities to express the desire of the Chinese to be made citizens of Malaya and not left out of the negotiations for independence.

40 For a fuller account of the Nadrah Affair, see Haja Maideen, *The Nadra Tragedy: The Maria Hertogh Controversy*, Kuala Lumpur: Pelanduk Press, 1989.

girl, then named Maria Hertogh, was subsequently given the name Nadrah and brought up as a Malay and a Muslim in Kemaman, Terengganu, by her foster-mother Aminah. After the war, Nadrah's foster-mother feared she would be taken back to Holland by the authorities. She therefore decided to marry Nadrah to Mansoor Adabi, a Malay schoolteacher from Kelantan. By then a search was being conducted for her on behalf of her parents in the Netherlands. When she was finally found, the British colonial authorities felt inclined to intervene and to return her to her family. But Nadrah was, by then, a Muslim woman who was married under Islamic law.

With a guerilla war being fought in the jungles of Malaya against the MCP, neither the British nor Malayan leaders were wont to deal with a situation as complicated as this. In the end, the British authorities decided to repatriate Nadrah to the Netherlands and to declare her marriage null and void. But this had serious implications for the status of Malay and Islamic laws and customs, for it put into question (1) the legal status of the *shahadah* (the formal declaration of faith for all Muslims) as a sign of conversion to Islam, (2) the legal status of Muslim marriages in the eyes of secular British constitutional law, and (3) the legal status of Malay-Muslim law and customs *vis-à-vis* British law.

Malayan Muslims were outraged by the decision of the British and Dutch authorities. Protest movements were launched, led by Islamists such as Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Taha Kalu. Also involved were Malay newspapers like *Melayu Raya* and movements such as the Malayan Muslim League. On 11-13 December 1951, the crisis led to violence as Malays rioted in the streets of Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. The human cost of the Nadrah crisis was high by Malayan standards then: eighteen people had been killed and 173 were wounded. Scores of buildings were burnt and destroyed. Hundreds of Malay and *Peranakan* Muslim activists had been arrested in the wake of the fighting. Seven people were found guilty of taking part in the demonstrations and were sentenced to death by the British authorities.

Although the whole Nadrah affair culminated with the defeat of the Islamists, it did offer them and the ulama an opportunity to assume leadership once more as the defenders of Muslim concerns. UMNO's plight was worsened by the failure of its leaders (in particular its president, Dato' Onn) to provide exemplary leadership during the confrontation with the British and Dutch authorities as the Nadrah crisis reached its peak. UMNO's religious affairs bureau members also protested against their leaders' decision to allow the issuance of gambling and alcohol licences.[41] In response to these

41 Ibnu Hasyim, *PAS Kuasai Malaysia? 1950-2000 Sejarah Kebangkitan dan Masa Depan*, Kuala Lumpur: G. Edar Press, 1993, p. 22.

difficulties and disagreements, the ulama and conservative Islamists within UMNO continued to discuss matters related to their religious concerns among themselves. In time, this group grew more and more cohesive and organised.

On 23 August 1951, the second UMNO-led Ulama Congress was held at the Sultan Sulaiman Club in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur. Still under the tutelage and sponsorship of UMNO, the congress was chaired by Haji Ahmad Fuad, who was then head of UMNO's religious affairs bureau, with Haji Ahmad Maliki as its secretary. The congress members began considering creating an organisation of their own. Members of the second Ulama Congress issued two resolutions: (1) to renew their efforts towards creating a National Supreme Council for Religious Affairs (*Badan Tertinggi Agama Islam Peringkat Kebangsaan*), and (2) to form an independent association of ulama not linked to any other political or welfare organisation.

On 23 August 1951, the Ulama Congress decided to form *Persatuan Alim Ulama Se-Malaya* (All-Malayan Ulama Organisation). A five-man steering committee was set up, consisting of: Haji Ahmad Fuad (chairman), Tuan Haji Ayub, S. Mohamad Hafiz, Saadon Zubir and Haji Mohamad Amin (Saadon Zubir and Haji Mohamad Amin were personally selected by Haji Ahmad Fuad). The committee was given the task of executing the decisions of the Congress and drafting the constitution for the new ulama association.[42]

UMNO had been rocked by an internal leadership struggle in mid-1950 when the liberal-minded Dato' Onn proposed that non-Malays be given membership of the movement. Onn was trying to create a broad-based conservative party open to all the races in the Malaysian Federation. He was rejected by his own party and was forced to resign. Onn later formed the Independence for Malaya Party (IMP), a multiracial party with a strong centrist-liberal character.

The sudden exit of Dato' Onn left UMNO in a state of limbo. During the UMNO meeting of 25-26 August 1950, the conservative Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, a prince from one of the Malay royal families, was elected the second president of UMNO, and Tun Abdul Razak (another scion from a royal house) was elected as his deputy. So abrupt was the split among the UMNO leadership and so quick the succession that the ordinary party members were unsure about where the party was heading and which leader to support. The ulama, in particular, were not happy with Tunku's penchant for sport cars, racehorses, dancing and alcohol (distractions which he never

42 Baharuddin Abdul Latif, *Islam Memanggil*, 1994. p. xvii.

hid from his followers and critics).[43] Around this time, Dato' Onn was also trying to persuade the more conservative UMNO elements to abandon Tunku and support him instead. Onn persuaded Haji Ahmad Fuad to form a faction of ulama and more religiously inclined UMNO members to ensure that Muslim concerns would not be marginalised within the party.

The third UMNO-led Ulama Congress was held at the Kelab Melayu Bagan (Bagan Malay Club) in Butterworth, Penang, on 23-24 November 1951. More than two hundred ulama attended, with twenty female representatives from all over the country, including Singapore. Among the ulama present were Ustaz Ahmad Badawi, Ustaz Mohamad Ghazali Abdullah, Ustaz Zabidi Ali, Ustaz Othman Hamzah and Ustaz Baharuddin Abdul Latif. Ustaz Ahmad Badawi presented his manifesto, entitled *'Manifesto al-Badawi: Ulama Kejalan Allah'* ('The Manifesto of al-Badawi: Ulama on the Path of Allah'). Ustaz Baharuddin Abdul Latif, in turn, argued that the Ulama Congress should lay down the organisational structure for a number of religious bodies and committees, including a *majlis fatwa* (fatwa council), *badan tabligh dan penyiaran* (council for joint relations), *badan perhubungan* (communications and information council) and a *badan pendidikan* (educational body).[44] At this congress it was decided to change the movement's name to *Persatuan Islam Se-Malaya* (Pan-Malayan Islamic Organisation). This small body, made up of a number of ulama, imams and conservative nationalists from both within and without UMNO, was the nucleus of the Pan-Malayan Islamic party which later came to be known as PAS. And thus PAS came to be born, on 24 November 1951, and emerged from the womb of UMNO.

The *Persatuan Islam Se-Malaya*'s first president was Haji Ahmad Fuad, who was then still the head of UMNO's Religious Affairs Bureau. In the election for the post of president he was challenged by Tuan Sheikh Haji Abdullah Fahim, father of Ustaz Ahmad Badawi. The first vice-president (*timbalan yang dipertua agung*) was Ustaz Mohamad Ghazali Abdullah. The deputy presidents (*naib yang dipertua agung*) were Ustaz Hussein Che Dol (head of northern division), Ustaz Abdul Rahman Jamaluddin al-Jempuli (head of southern division) and Fakir Muhammad Nor (head of midlands division). The secretary-general (*setiausaha agung*) was Ustaz Ahmad Maliki, and the treasurer (*bendahari agung*) was Haji Ahmad Tuan Hussein. Committee members (*ahli jawatankuasa agung*) included men

43 Harry Miller, *Prince and Premier: A Biography of Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj*, London: Harrap, 1959.

44 Baharuddin Abdul Latif, *Sedikit untuk Persidangan Alim Ulama*. Reported in *Utusan Melayu*, 21 November 1951. Quoted in Baharuddin, *Islam Memanggil*, p. 9.

such as Ustaz Yahya Junid, Haji Uthman Talib, Haji Mohammad Nor, Haji Zabidi Ali, Haji Abdul Wahab Nur, Haji Assaiyya (future Mufti of Perak), Haji Ahmad Badur and Muhammad Mahzub. UMNO members on the committee included Ustaz Ahmad Badawi, Ustaz Ahmad Maliki, Ustaz Ahmad Sahir, Haji Ahmad Long and Haji Ahmad Mansoor.[45] Osman Abdullah, first the secretary of PAS at Hilir Perak, was later elected head of the PAS youth assembly (Dewan Pemuda PAS). The radical nationalist-turned-Islamist Mohammad Asri Muda later joined as a committee member. (He eventually became secretary-general after Ustaz Ahmad Maliki left the party.)

The new Islamist organisation was housed at Madrasah Masriyyah at Tanah Liat, near Bukit Mertajam and its first office was at Kepala Batas, Seberang Perai. For its flag, the organisation chose the red-and-white banner of the radical nationalists, but added the party's own Islamic symbols – a green full moon (in the centre or top left-hand corner of the flag) and the words 'Allah' and 'Muhammad'. It is interesting to note that the flags of PAS, UMNO and PKMM all shared the same red-and-white background as the *Sang Saka Merah-Putih* of the Indonesian nationalists; this was yet another reminder of how political Islam in Malaya was, from the outset, the result of a wider mobilisation of Muslims across the region.

PAS's organisational structure was fairly uncomplicated at the beginning. The party's policies were decided by the *jawatankuasa agung* (executive committee) chaired by its president. Three main *dewan* (sections) represented three major constituencies within the party: the *Dewan Ulama* (Ulama Council), *Dewan Pemuda* (Youth Wing) and *Dewan Muslimat* (Women's Wing). The rest of the membership was made up of ordinary party members. The *Dewan Ulama* was part of the party from the very beginning, though its members did not have as much power and influence then. At this stage of the party's development, the ulama played only an advisory role and the *Dewan Ulama* did not have the power to direct policies or to veto policy decisions which they felt were contrary to the spirit and norms of Islam.

The idea of a women's wing (*Dewan Muslimat*) was suggested on 3 April 1951 by Ustaz Haji Zabidi Ali, who argued that the party had to open itself to female members and to make sure that women were part of the Islamist struggle in the country. PAS was worried that if it did not open the way for women to enter the party they would join *Kaum Ibu* (Women's Wing) of UMNO instead.[46] The *Dewan Muslimat* was officially launched on 1 January

45 Ibid., p. xxvi.

46 *The Kaum Ibu Movement: Its History and Achievements*, Kuala Lumpur: UMNO Party Headquarters, Perchetakan Merdeka, 1967.

1952 during the party's first official general assembly, held at Kepala Batas, Seberang Perai. The Dewan Muslimat had its own seven-woman executive committee, chaired by Ustazah Sharifah Rahmah.[47]

PAS was a loosely organised organization at the time, which also allowed for double membership. (Many of its members were, at the time, UMNO members too.) Because of the organisation's relaxed guidelines, many members were confused about their own standing and identity within the party. Some felt that being a member of PAS was equivalent to being a member of UMNO. Others argued that the practice of dual membership eroded the credibility of PAS. The only thing that united the members of PAS then was their consensus in terms of their party's goals. On 4 January 1953, the fourth Ulama Congress was held at Kepala Batas. At this stage, the *Persatuan Islam Se-Malaya* declared its aim of struggling for an Islamic state.

But PAS had entered the arena of Malayan politics with no friends or allies. In 1952, UMNO and MCA formed the Alliance (*Perikatan*) coalition to contest the municipal elections in Kuala Lumpur and 16 other municipalities. Tunku's and Tan Cheng Lock's gamble paid off, and the two parties won a resounding victory: the Alliance won 94 of the 124 seats contested (UMNO won 70, and MCA 24). The MCA central committee then voted to turn their organisation into a fully fledged political party and both UMNO and MCA were invited to take part in the negotiations with the British over the question of independence and the shape of the future Malayan government.

With no allies to count upon, PAS's main claim at the time was to be the defender of Malay-Muslim rights and interests. It was on that basis that PAS rejected UMNO and MCA's argument that Malayan citizenship should be granted to the Chinese and Indian minorities on the basis of *jus soli* – that they were born in the country. PAS also insisted that voting rights should not be automatically granted to the non-Malay communities. Other issues related to Malay-centric concerns such as the status of the Malay royal families, the Malay language and the place of Islam as the state religion were also hotly debated.

Yet despite the strong stand that PAS was able to effect in public, in reality the party was suffering from a lack of internal co-ordination and control. From 1951-53 its leadership structure was weak and in 1953 PAS suffered its first internal rift because of the rule permitting dual membership, which allowed many PAS members to be involved in the political battles being fought outside the organisation. The situation worsened when Haji Ahmad Fuad, PAS's president, decided to openly support his old friend and ex-president

47 *Mujahidah IV*, May 1999, p. 8.

of UMNO, Dato' Onn Jaafar. Ahmad Fuad was subsequently rejected by his own party and left PAS in September 1953, after a special PAS General Meeting. Other prominent PAS members, including Ustaz Ahmad Badawi and Ustaz Ahmad Maliki, also left the organisation and re-joined UMNO.[48]

Following the departure of Ahmad Fuad, PAS began to draw the boundaries that defined the party's identity in terms of its ideology and membership. PAS henceforth ended the practice of dual membership and re-stated its goal of creating an Islamic state in Malaya. But with independence drawing closer, it still had to find a leader who could lead the party. Eventually PAS's executive committee elected Dr. Abbas Elias as the party's second president at a general assembly held at Sekolah Tahzibiyyah, Titi Serong near Parit Buntar, Perak. Dr. Abbas was away on the *haj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca at the time, and was only told of the committee's decision as he was making his homeward journey back to Malaya.[49] By then, PAS was keen to show that it had its own political platform and would not accept the model of the independent state that UMNO and its allies were proposing. The task of developing the party's political agenda and propagating it to the masses fell on the shoulders of its second president.

Dr. Abbas Elias won born on 15 July 1914 at Kampong Bandar, Selangor. His father, Haji Elias bin Hussein, was of Sumatran (Minangkabau) origin, while his mother was a Malay woman from Selangor. He had a mainly secular educational background, in the field of medicine. He received his early education at the Anglo-Chinese School (Setiawan), King Edward VII School (Taiping) and then the Medical College in Singapore. All the schools he attended were built during the colonial period as part of the colonial education system. He travelled to England in 1949 to study public health, and returned to Malaya as a qualified doctor and secured a job in the colonial medical service. Despite his secular educational background, Dr. Abbas was regarded as the best man to lead the Islamic party. His Western educational background meant that he could speak and write in both Malay and English, which was of crucial importance as the PAS leaders were forced to negotiate not only with the Malay constituency in the rural heartland, but also the British colonial authorities who paid scant attention to this small party of 'religious elders and imams'. Upon his return from the *haj*, Dr. Abbas received a letter from Osman Abdullah, secretary of PAS, inviting him to take over the party presidency.

48 Baharuddin, *Islam Memanggil*, p. v.

49 Interview with Dr. Abbas Elias, 23 May 1999.

Dr. Abbas's leadership of PAS (1953-1956) can be described as mixed as well. As a functionary in the British colonial medical service, his movements and activities were being constantly monitored by the authorities. PAS was also a very poor party at the time, and widely regarded as an organisation consisting of peasants, farmers and religious preachers. So poor was PAS then that it could not afford to rent an office, or even buy its own typewriter.[50] As if these obstacles weren't enough, PAS was also handicapped by many legal restrictions. Technically, the Islamic party was not yet registered. Dr. Abbas managed to get it registered as an official political party on 31 May 1955, just one day before nomination day and one week before election campaigning began.[51] For the sake of the election, the party was re-registered under another name: the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP).

At the general elections that were held on 27 July 1955, PAS could only afford to field 11 candidates (as compared to UMNO, that fielded 35). PAS's first election campaign symbol was a white hand against a green background, dubbed the '*tangan terbuka*' ('Open hand of invitation'). PAS's critics wasted little time before they made a joke of it, claiming that this was proof that should PAS come to power it would go on a hand-chopping spree and impose *Hudud* punishments across the country. However, such scare tactics proved quite unnecessary. Despite the high turnout of voters (80.8%), and the fact that relatively more Malays were allowed to vote compared to non-Malays whose citizenship status remained unresolved, PAS was clearly not in a position to take on the might of UMNO and the Alliance. Of the 52 seats contested, 51 were won by the Alliance parties (UMNO won 36 seats and MCA won 15). The Alliance gained 81% of the votes and 98.1% of seats in parliament. PAS was soundly defeated; it won only one seat, in Kerian, Perak. Its candidate was Haji Ahmad Tuan Hussein, a local guru at the pondok school of Pokok Sena. Many of the other PAS candidates lost their deposits.

PAS's first election campaign turned out to be its baptism by fire; almost totally wiped out at the polls, the leaders of the new Islamist party had learned for the first time what party politics was really like, and how complicated election campaigns were. The 1955 election taught the PAS leaders the importance of a sound organisational structure and a solid chain of command. The party still lacked permanent office staff, which meant that

50 Interview with Dr. Abbas Elias, 23 May 1999.

51 In an interview on 23 May 1999, Dr. Abbas candidly revealed that he had managed to get the party registered so fast simply because the registrar of societies was a friend who owed him a favour. Dr. Abbas had obtained a job for the registrar during the difficult times of the Japanese occupation (1941-46) and thus he felt obliged to return the favour.

paperwork and records were badly kept. Most of the party's office workers worked on a voluntary basis and they could not be relied upon to keep the party machinery going efficiently. Despite PAS's constant attacks on UMNO leaders such as Tunku Abdul Rahman, the UMNO party had nonetheless managed to organise itself and build a political party machine in a short space of time. This, in the end, turned out to be the crucial factor that guaranteed UMNO's success and PAS's failure at the polls.

After the elections of 1955, it was clear to everyone – British and Malayans alike – that UMNO was the only real party that could mobilise the Malay-Muslims, and that the UMNO-MCA Alliance was the only coalition that could represent the different communities of the country. Tunku was seen as the only Malay-Muslim leader who could lead an independent Malaya, and UMNO vice president Tun Razak was given the task of writing a report on the state of education in the country; the Razak Report of 1956.[52]

By 1956 the Reid Commission (named after its chairman Lord Reid) was set up by the British authorities with the intention of finalising the legal and technical details of the transfer of power from the British to the Malayan government. The date for independence was set for 31 August 1957. While UMNO took the lead in representing Malay interests, PAS submitted its own memorandum to the Reid Commission that spelt out their concerns as well as demands. The party leaders insisted that Malayan national identity should be based mainly on Malay cultural identity and the religion of the Malays, Islam. This would reflect the privileged status and rights of the Malays as the sons of the soil (*bumiputera*) and the rightful inheritors of the Malay lands (*tanah melayu*), a point touched upon in the opening paragraphs of the memorandum:

> 2. (a). This country is a Malay country and the rights of the Malays in Malaya have been from time to time historically proven and legally recognised. The provision for the safeguarding of the special position of the Malays, which is included in the Commission's terms of reference, should not therefore be looked upon from a ground other than that Malaya belongs to the Malays. Any attempt, constitutionally or otherwise, to change that position is both contradictory to human rights and the principle of law. The Malays have only one position in

52 The Razak Report on Education, released in April 1956, called for the creation of a national education policy and national curriculum with Malay as the medium of instruction. Malay was also to be made the main official language of the country. The findings of the report gained the support of the Malays from both UMNO and PAS (and the Malay leftists of the PRM), but it led to protests from the Chinese education lobby and the MCA.

> this country and that is that they own this country, and that their sovereignty is the sovereignty of the country.[53]

The memorandum also made it blatantly clear that PAS was not about to compromise on the question of the place of Islam and Muslim concerns in the country. It regarded Islam, Islamic values and Islamic practices as not only part and parcel of Malay (and thus Malayan) identity, but also the most appropriate guidelines for the future development and government of the nation:

> 8. One of the implications of the constitutional recognition of Malayan culture and Malayan education is that ISLAM should be the official religion in this country. This is far from a prejudiced point of view. But as the Commission itself has taken unto its shoulder the responsibility for introducing a second form of constitution for the federation, this association (PAS) feels that there shall be no neglect in this point (sic). This association (PAS) feels wholeheartedly that the precepts of Islam are capable of guiding the progress of this country in its future political evolution. [54]

But PAS was not taken seriously by the British authorities who chose instead to negotiate with UMNO and MCA; for the latter had, after all, won a convincing victory at the elections of the previous year. In the same year that witnessed the Suez crisis in Egypt (October-November 1956) and the defeat of Arab-Muslim forces at the hands of Britain, France and Israel, the mood in the country had changed in many respects. It was felt that the circumstances required a different kind of leader – one prepared and able to give the Islamic party a more dynamic and even radical image. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy was widely regarded as the leader of the radical nationalist camp, and he had played an important role in the formation of several anti-colonial movements, from the PKMM to the *Parti Rakyat* and *Parti Buruh*. PAS's leaders realised that if they were to gain the attention of the British authorities and the Malay-Muslim elite, they would need a leader who would make his audience sit up and listen. To that end, Dr. Abbas approached Dr. Burhanuddin personally, and the latter responded positively on Christmas Day, 1956. It was the best present the party had received since its slow and complicated birth five years earlier.

53 PAS *Dalam Arus Perjuangan Kemerdekaan,* p. 87
54 Ibid., p. 91

PAS under Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy: Islamism to the Left

> There has come into the political arena a powerful factor: Young Malaya, with all the vigour that is latent in its blood. And to lead Young Malaya comes Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy ...
>
> Karim Ghani, writing in *The Comrade* (1946)[55]

The ascendancy of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy to the position of the third president of PAS opened the way for a reorientation of the party's political focus, and led to the emergence of PAS as a full-fledged Islamist-nationalist anti-colonial party, in tandem with developments that were taking place elsewhere in the Muslim world at the time. It has to be remembered that the 1950s was a period of tumultuous change and experimentation across the Muslim world. In Iran, the rise of Mohammad Mosaddegh led to alarm bells ringing across the Western world, as Western leaders grew worried about the growing popularity of a Muslim leader who was bent on nationalising Iranian oil and gas facilities at the expense of Western petrol companies. The same had happened in Indonesia when Sukarno's government likewise nationalised Dutch assets that were seized after Indonesian independence. In Egypt, Gammel Abdel Nasser's project of Pan-Arab nationalism likewise spooked Western elites and securocrats who were concerned about the emergence of a muscular Egypt that would exert control over the Suez canal and nationalise the economy. It seemed as if the entire Muslim world had been struck by the bug of post-colonial self-determination, threatening to weaken the hegemony of the West over the rest.

That Dr. Burhanuddin would prove to be a cause of concern for Westernised right-leaning Asian elites is hardly a surprise considering his background and personal beliefs. The reason why he was chosen to lead PAS at this critical juncture of the party's history is obvious: his Islamist and Leftist credentials were clear for all to see, and he was counted as among the first Malay-Muslim leaders of Malaya to speak of 'Islamic socialism' in no uncertain terms. In his essay on Islamic ideology, he wrote:

> An Islamic theocracy should not be confused with what is often called a 'theocracy' in the West. If the theory of primitive socialism or communism were based on the notion of a 'collective', then even a primitive society would have something in common with a theocratic

55 Haja Maideen, *The Nadrah Tragedy*, Kuala Lumpur: Pelanduk Press, 1989, p. 141.

> collective. This is shown in history. *Therefore an Islamic society would be in a sense a theocratic collective or a form of theocratic socialism.* (Emphasis mine)[56]

Born on 29 November 1911 in Changkat Tualang, Kota Bharu, Perak, Burhanuddin was the son of a Sumatran migrant. His father, Haji Muhammad Noor, was a Minangkabau scholar who taught *tasawuf* (rational metaphysics) and also worked as an agriculturist. His mother was Sharifah Zahrah Habib Osman, a Malaccan woman of Malay-Arab *Peranakan* descent. In 1927, at the age of 16, Burhanuddin travelled to Penang to study at Syed Sheikh Ahmad al-Hadi's famous reformist Madrasah al-Mashoor where he was taught by the reformist ulama and friend of Syed Sheikh al-Hadi, Sheikh Mohamad Tahir Jalaludin al-Azhari. Both Syed Sheikh al-Hadi and Sheikh Tahir were, as we have seen, leading figures in the reformist *Kaum Muda* movement who were keen to promote modern ideas and techniques in Muslim education. In 1928, Burhanuddin left for further education in India. He studied homeopathic medicine at the Ismaileah Medical College at Secudrabad, Hyderabad, and later became famous as the first Malay to practise homeopathic medicine in Malaya.[57] After completing his medical studies he read philosophy at the Aligarh Muhammadan Anglo-Indian College.[58]

In 1937, Burhanuddin returned to Malaya, and soon after moved to Singapore. While in Singapore he came into contact with Onn Jaafar (the future founder-president of UMNO), who was then editor of *Lembaga Malaya*. In 1937, he founded and published a reformist magazine of his own, *Taman Bahagia*. Burhanuddin had assembled the editorial team of the magazine which they proposed to use as a platform to raise Muslim concerns, including the question of Palestine. In 1939, he became a member of the *Kesatuan Melayu Muda* (KMM) through his associate Mustapha Hussain, and thus joined the ranks of the radical Malay nationalist movement alongside more secular radical nationalists such as Ibrahim Yaakob, Ishak Haji Muhammad and Ahmad Boestaman.[59] The KMM radicals were keen observers of developments outside the narrow confines of British Malaya.

56 Burhanuddin al-Helmy, 'Ideoloji Politik Islam', in PAS *dalam Arus Perjuangan Kemerdekaan,* Selangor: Panel Pengkaji Sejarah, Pusat Penyelidikan PAS, Angkatan Edaran, 1999, p. 73.

57 Ibnu Hasyim, *PAS Kuasai Malaysia? 1950-2000 Sejarah Kebangkitan dan Masa Depan*, Kuala Lumpur: G. Edar Press, 1993, p. 79.

58 Ahmad Boestaman, *Merintis Jalan ke Puncak*, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1979, p. 27.

59 Kamarudin, 'Perjuangan dan Pemikiran Politik Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy', p. 32.

Their role models at the time were the radical nationalist leaders Sukarno and Muhammad Hatta of Indonesia.

During the Japanese occupation of 1941-45, Burhanuddin, like many other Malay Islamists, was forced to take a back seat in the political developments of the country. As seen earlier, the Japanese preferred to promote the radical nationalists whom they regarded as being more anti-British and thus malleable to their interests.The Japanese were more cautious with Burhanuddin, and he was given little to do and even less opportunity to spread his own ideas and influence. One of the few positions he was allowed to hold was advisor on Malay customs and culture to the Japanese Command Centre in Taiping, Perak.[60] While there, he worked towards developing the educational activities of *Madrasah Ma'ahad al-Ehya as-Sharif* at Gunung Semanggul – which later became the headquarters of the *Hizbul Muslimin* party. Constantly under the surveillance of the Japanese authorities, he tried, nonetheless, to continue his efforts to propagate his Islamist ideology to those prepared to listen. On a few occasions he addressed the communist guerrillas of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJA) operating in the jungle. Burhanuddin even managed to convert a few of them to Islam and his line of thinking.[61] It was only after the war, however, that Burhanuddin had a chance to truly engage himself in Malay-Muslim politics and the opportunity came when he – along with other Malay activists like Mokhtaruddin Lasso, Ahmad Boestaman and Ishak Haji Muhammad – formed the *Partai Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya* (PKMM) on 17 October 1945.

After the departure of Mokhtaruddin Lasso in 1945, Burhanuddin rose to become the president of the PKMM in 1946. By then, the majority of the PKMM's leaders were radical nationalists with strong leftist inclinations; Sultan Djenain served as the PKMM's main link to the *Partai Komunis Indonesia* (Indonesian Communist Party, PKI). A number of other prominent Malay communists were also party members: Musa Ahmad, ex-head of MCP, became head of BATAS, PKMM's peasants' front; Dahari Ali, first secretary of PKMM; Abdul Rashid Mydin, who was also active in MCP, and Abdullah C. D., who was active in the MCP and later promoted to commander of the MCP's 10th Malay regiment. Also at this time, a host

60 Ibid., p. 33.

61 Hussein Mutalib, *Islam in Malaysia: From Revivalism to Islamic State?*, Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1993, p. 24. One of the communist guerrillas Dr. Burhanuddin converted to Islam was Gerald de Cruz, who later became a member of the Muslim Converts Association of Singapore.

of pro-Indonesian movements were being formed all over Malaya and Singapore. They included the *Pembantu Indonesia Merdeka* (Supporters of Independent Indonesia, PIM), *Partai Republik Indonesia* (Republican Party of Indonesia, PRI), *Partai Buruh Indonesia* (Indonesian Workers' Party, PBI) and the *Kelab Buruh Indonesia* (Indonesian Workers' Club, KBI). For many Malay nationalists like Burhanuddin whose families had originally come from Indonesia, support for the pro-independence movement in Indonesia came naturally. He was particularly close to the PIM and he often met its leaders at the PKMM's main office at Batu Road in Kuala Lumpur.[62]

At this stage of my recounting, it might well be asked: to what extent was Dr. Burhanuddin truly an Islamist, and truly a Leftist? And did he succeed in developing a brand of Islamist-Leftist politics that was distinct from the other religio-political streams of thought in Malaya at the time?

What is clear is that, by the mid-1950s, just before he was invited to lead the Islamist party PAS, Burhanuddin had been visibly associated with almost all the Malay-Muslim anti-colonial movements in Malaya. He was involved in the development of the KMM, the PKMM and the *Hizbul Muslimin*. He was also known for his obvious sympathies to the Muslims of Indonesia, who had been engaged in a prolonged battle against the Dutch to secure their independence for good. Burhanuddin's own educational background took him to Muslim institutions of learning in Malaya, among which were the reformist *madrasahs* of the *Kaum Muda*, and later to India, where he claimed to have met Indian nationalist leaders (including Jinnah). That he was committed to the cause of Third World nationalism, anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism was beyond doubt; he attended the Bandung Conference at the invitation of Indonesian nationalists, and supported the formation of Malaya's workers' parties and movements such as the *Parti Rakyat Malaysia* (PRM).

In the writings of Burhanuddin (*Perjuangan Kita*, 1946; *Asas Falsafah Kebangsaan Melayu*, 1954), a consistent chain of equivalences can be found; his anti-colonial stance was one that was configured along an oppositional dialectics that noted that almost all Muslim societies had come under the yoke of colonialism and Western imperialism by the late 19th century. As Muslims were colonised subjects worldwide, the one thing that united and equalised them was the common experience of colonial domination and servitude. Colonialism subjugated Muslims the world over, but it also afforded them a common rallying point to focus upon. Two bonds were created as a result: a common, universal socio-cultural bond that was found

62 Ramlah, *Dr. Burhanuddin a-Helmy*, p. 44.

in their common Muslim identity; and a political bond that was found in their common state of political subservience.

It was upon this basis that Burhanuddin attempted to merge the ideas of political Islam and leftist politics together. He understood, and accepted, the need for nationalism as a means of regaining a sense of lost power and self-respect, but noted in his writings (1946, 1954) that nationalism was only half the battle. What was needed was a gesture that exceeded the short-term ends of ending colonialism and attaining state capture. It was for this reason that he lauded the grandiose projects of Sukarno and Nasser, whom he regarded as visionaries driven by a higher purpose. Nasser and Sukarno's dreams of creating a greater Pan-Arab and Pan-Indonesian bloc that would exceed the political boundaries of the former colonies seemed to him to be an attempt to remember that broken body politic that had been severed as a result of the colonial interruption.

Burhanuddin's chance to create this 'third alternative' finally came when he was given the opportunity to lead PAS in 1956. For many of his friends, his decision to assume the PAS leadership signalled the emergence of a progressive Islamic party in Malaya. This was spelt out in no uncertain terms in his speech of acceptance when he officially took over the presidency of the party:

> Why is it that I have chosen to lead PAS? In our society today there are three forces struggling side by side competing with one another but working closely together against colonialism. These forces are potential forces and their roots lie with the people. *They are the forces of nationalism, the forces of Islamism and the forces of socialism. They are not separable from one another but are in fact related to one another...* In nationalism we find the element of socialism because nationalism in its fundamental interpretation is based on consciousness and the aspiration to build a just society... In socialism one finds elements of nationalism because socialism by itself cannot be built unless it is pioneered by a nationalist spirit to blaze the path towards freedom and away from the yoke of colonialism. The building of socialism can be regarded as the final extension of these developments ... In a way elements of nationalism are also found in Islamism, as it is vital to base the national liberation movement on the high principles of Islamism. The *common factor in these three forces is their fundamental anticolonial stand;* their common objective being the need to build a free, democratic and sovereign nation.

> As such, these forces should necessarily work side by side, mutually strengthening one another. *Their enemy are the forces of colonialism and imperialism, which does not come from one main source or one country.* In its full attire, imperialism has an international pattern. The forces of imperialism are further strengthened by the presence of weak and reactionary elements: by the presence of feudal elements, the compradore-capitalists and their ilk. To oppose them one or two forces alone may not be sufficiently strong enough, and it is imperative that all progressive forces in society should come together, to consolidate and unite, and should be bound in one massive combatant force. (*Emphasis mine*) [63]

It is interesting to note that even in his address as the new president of PAS, Burhanuddin was already referring to the 'three anti-colonial forces' that were working together against a common enemy, namely: Islam, nationalism and Communism/Socialism. The similarity with Sukarno's own triple alliance of Nationalists-Islamists-Communists (dubbed 'Nasakom' in Indonesia) is hardly coincidental, and again reflects the cosmopolitan outlook of PAS's leaders then.

During the first few years of Burhanuddin's presidency, the vice president of PAS was the Cairo-educated Dr. Zulkiflee Muhammad (who had joined the party in 1955).[64] Dr. Zulkiflee was well known throughout the country as a respected Islamist thinker and expert on Islamic disciplines such as *fiqh* (jurisprudence). He had travelled widely to other Muslim countries like Egypt and was a close friend of contemporary Indonesian Islamist thinker Hamka. (He was also famous for his extraordinary oratory skills; in Parliament, Dr. Zulkiflee set a new national record when he delivered a speech on Islam and politics that lasted more than four hours.) With Dr. Burhanuddin and Dr. Zulkiflee at the helm of the Islamist party, PAS braced itself for the coming of independence and the long-term challenge of becoming the country's one and only Islamist opposition party.

63 PAS *dalam Arus Perjuangan Kemerdekaan, pp*. 76-77.

64 Ustaz Zulkiflee Muhammad received his education at Al-Azhar in Cairo, where he was president of the Malay Students Association. Upon his return to Malaya, Ustaz Zulkiflee, like Dr. Burhanuddin, spent some time teaching and writing. He taught at the Islamic College at Klang, Selangor. He was also a prolific pamphleteer and one of PAS's best speakers. (Kessler, *Islam and Malay Politics in a Malay State*, p. 118 n. 30). He joined PAS in 1955 and served as the deputy president under Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy. He was responsible for establishing PAS's contacts with other Islamist movements in Indonesia and the Arab world. He passed away in a car accident on 6 May 1964 (Ibnu Hasyim, *PAS Kuasai Malaysia*, p. 202).

On 31 August 1957, the Federation of Malaya gained its independence with the president of UMNO, Tunku Abdul Rahman, becoming the country's first prime minister. Tun Ismail became the first governor of Bank Negara, Tan Siew Sin was made the country's first finance minister and V.T. Sambanthan was the first public works minister.[65] Tuanku Abdul Rahman ibni al-Marhum Tuanku Muhammad was chosen by the Conference of Rulers to be the country's first constitutional monarch, the *Yang Di-Pertuan Agong*. At that point in Malaya's early history, the country's links to the mother-country Britain were very strong indeed. The Malayan flag was raised for the first time in Kuala Lumpur, and a few hours later in front of Malaya House in Trafalgar Square, London. The national anthem, 'Negaraku' ('My Country') was also played for the first time. The Federation of Malaya inherited the Westminster system of parliamentary democracy with a constitutional monarch as its head of state, something that the UMNO leaders in particular were keen to install. With half of the world's remaining royal families behind them, the new Malay conservative élite were in a position to take full advantage of the enormous amount of political, bureaucratic and economic power that now lay at their disposal. While the *Agong* (king) was meant to serve as the head of state and the symbolic referent for Islam's status as the official religion of the country, it was the prime minister who wielded real power in the newly independent country. As Kershaw says: 'In place of effective (or imaginable) mechanisms involving the royalty, it was the dominant Malay party – UMNO – that guaranteed the perpetuation of Malay rights.'[66]

The secular nature of the constitution was apparent in the way that it guaranteed religious pluralism and the freedom of belief. Among the various laws that protected the rights of the religious minorities were: The Hindu and Muslim Endowments Ordinance of 1949, The Cheng Hong Temple (Incorporation) Act of 1949, The Pure Life Society (Suddha Samajam) Incorporation Ordinance of 1957, The Daughters of Charity of the Canossian Institute (Incorporated) Ordinance of 1957 and the Superior of the Institute of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (Incorporated) Ordinance of 1957. The country also inherited a strong and centralised top-heavy federal government apparatus where certain institutions (such as the Royal Malayan Police Force, RMPF) were stronger than others.

65 Abdullah Ahmad notes that when Tunku became prime minister, he allocated jobs to the non-Malay members of his cabinet according to the respective economic roles played by their communities. (Re: Abdullah Ahmad, *Tunku Abdul Rahman and Malaysia's Foreign Policy 1963-1970*, Kuala Lumpur: Berita Publishing, 1985, p. 14.)

66 Kershaw, p. 61.

As soon as independence was gained, the Malayan government was forced to deal with the impending global commodity crisis that threatened to jeopardise its development and economic stability. The high level of population growth (3.4%, one of the highest in the world) and rising unemployment gave cause for concern to local and foreign investors alike.[67] Despite these challenges, the UMNO-MCA alliance was, for all intents and purposes, the only real alliance that kept the different ethnic communities of the country together at a time when Malaya's own national security was under threat as a result of the Communist insurgency in the countryside. Malaya depended on the goodwill of its Western allies (notably Britain) as it was surrounded by hostile states such as Indonesia that regarded it as a weak neo-colonial state allied to the West. UMNO's leadership had shown that independence could be won without bloodshed, as long as the country was led by aristocrats and technocrats of some social standing. PAS on the other hand was still a poor party, unable to gain the support and financial backing of the Malay-Muslims who would be its natural constituency.

The first thing that Dr. Burhanuddin and Dr. Zulkiflee did was focus on the internal organisation of the Islamist party they had come to lead. Recognising that the party was poor and without a support base, they began to create branches of PAS all over the country while focusing on the Malay-Muslim-majority states of Kelantan, Trengganu and Kedah in the north of the Malayan Peninsula. This task was given to the able and charismatic leader Asri Muda who, like Burhanuddin, had also been involved with the PKMM and *Hizbul Muslimin* before. The smooth-talking Asri would rise to become one of the most popular and influential leaders of the party, and eventually the president of PAS, as we shall see later.

PAS was also keen to maintain the momentum of its struggle, and it was not long before the party raised, yet again, the question of Malaya's status as a secular (as opposed to Islamic) state. While articles 3, 11(1), 11(2), 11(3), 11(4), 12(1), 12(2) and 12(3) of the new Malayan Federal Constitution provided for freedom of worship and the propagation of religion, they did not go as far as the Islamists wanted in terms of establishing Islam as the religion of State per se.[68] But PAS was also caught in a double bind of sorts at the time, for its

67 For a fuller account of the commodity crisis and its economic impact in Malaya, see Samuel Bassey Okposin and Cheng Ming Yu, *Economic Crises in Malaysia: Causes, Implications and Policy Prescriptions*, Kuala Lumpur: Pelanduk Press, 2000.

68 Article 11(1) of the constitution declares that every Malayan citizen has the right to profess and practise his or her own religion and to propagate it. But the freedom to propagate religion is circumscribed by article 11(4) which states that it is illegal to propagate any other religion among those who are already Muslim. Article 11(2) protects citizens from having to pay any

closest allies were the parties of the *Fron Sosialis Rakyat Malaya* (People's Socialist Front of Malaya, FSRM), all of whom were secular in orientation and which were less concerned about the status of Malaya as an Islamic state. From the outset, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, PAS had been forced to straddle a difficult and sometimes uncomfortable line between its right-leaning nationalist adversaries and its left-leaning secular allies.

Painfully aware of the fact that it was the only Islamist party on Malaya's new political landscape, PAS attempted to maintain its position as an opposition party by challenging the nationalist credentials of the new UMNO-MCA Alliance government instead, while also affirming its long-standing opposition to all forms of colonial and neo-colonial politics. Dr. Burhanuddin raised the question of the new Malayan government's geopolitical standing on several occasions, as when he spoke thus:

> UMNO leaders have time and again repeated the claim that without UMNO Malaya will never get its independence. This contention is acceptable, but the question is: What type of independence? I said that the contention is acceptable because it is only in UMNO and not in any other forces of nationalism that imperialism and imperialist interests will be guaranteed when they hand over political power in this country. The present leadership of UMNO have proven themselves to be trustworthy guardians of imperialist-capitalist interests because it has consistently shown its willingness to compromise and even to capitulate to the imperialists on questions of fundamental interest to the people.[69]

Through the party's own communications organs – the first of which was the party newsletter *Suara Islam* (*Voice of Islam*) that was launched in 1956[70] – the Islamist anti-colonialist message of PAS was being circulated across the country among the party's members for the first time. With these

taxes that would be allocated to any religious cause apart from his or her own, while article 11(3) guarantees the right for all religious communities to manage their own religious affairs. Article 12(1) prevents any form of discrimination on the grounds of religious belief. Clause 2 of the same article establishes the right for religious communities to form and maintain institutions of learning for their own faith communities while article 12(3) guarantees that no citizen shall be required to receive religious instruction in any religion apart from his own.

69 Dr. Burhanuddin's acceptance speech, 1956. Quoted in PAS *dalam Arus Perjuangan Kemerdekaan*, p. 81.

70 Asri Muda was the first Chief Editor of *Suara Islam* when it was first published in Kota Bharu, Kelantan.

meager tools at hand, PAS prepared itself for the general elections of 1959. They were as surprised by the results as their opponents were.

At the elections of 1959, the Alliance did not fare as well as it had done in 1955; its share of the vote was drastically cut from 81% to a mere 51.8%. However, due to the first-past-the-post system inherited from the British model, the Alliance won a higher proportion of parliamentary seats – 74 (71.1%) out of 104. PAS contested 58 seats and won 21.3% of the votes and 13 seats (12.5% of seats) in the federal parliament. The party also won 42 state assembly seats, most in the northern states – 9 of the 10 seats contested in Kelantan and 4 of the 6 contested in Terengganu. As a result, the party took control of the entire northeast of the Malay Peninsula when it won control of the state assemblies of Kelantan and Terengganu. Dr. Burhanuddin won the parliamentary seat in Besut, Terengganu. Other prominent PAS leaders elected to Parliament were Dr. Zulkiflee Muhammad (Bachok), Hasan Adli Arshat (Kuala Terengganu Utara), Khatijah Sidek (Dungun), Osman Abdullah (Tanah Merah), Datuk Raja Muhamad Hanifah (Pasir Mas), Haji Ahmad Perai (Kelantan Hilir), Harun Pilus (Terengganu Tengah) and Asri Muda. PAS's allies in the Socialist Front (PRM and PBM) won 22.1% of the votes (more than PAS, it should be noted) but they won only 9 parliamentary seats. Altogether, the instrumental coalition of Islamist and Leftist parties had also won control of several town councils such as Kota Bharu, Kuala Terengganu, Melaka, Penang and Seremban, as well as local authorities in places like Serdang, Jinjang (in Kuala Lumpur) and Lapis.

It is interesting to note that PAS had actually managed to win control of two states despite the fact that the party (in 1959) did not enjoy the same clout and financial support from the Malay-Muslim community as the Alliance parties did then. What did register, however, was the fact that PAS's criticisms of UMNO as a secular, pro-Western party of elite interests had begun to bite, and that PAS's call for an Islamic state had more traction than had been anticipated. Soon after the elections, the conservative leaders of UMNO were thinking of new ways and means to promote their own Islamic image and agenda, and one of their first gestures was the introduction of the annual Qur'an reading contest in 1960. The *Islamisation race* between UMNO and PAS had begun.[71]

71 UMNO leader Tunku Abdul Rahman regarded the Qur'an reading contest as one of the earliest UMNO victories in the Islamisation race in Malaya. In 1969, he wrote: 'Malaysia has led the way in Qur'an reading competitions. Since these competitions began in 1960, Malaysia has received great praise, being held in an esteem in the Muslim world accorded to no other country but Saudi Arabia, home of Mecca and Medina.' (Re: Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra al-Haj, *May 13: Before and After*, Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Melayu Press, 1969, p. 41.)

The next crisis that Malaya had to face was the formation of the Federation of Malaysia, that was planned for 1963. By then it had become obvious that Britain was no longer able to maintain most of its colonies east of Suez, and it was clear that Singapore, Sabah (North Borneo) and Sarawak would soon be given their independence. The region of Southeast Asia, however, was by then deemed a hotspot on the geopolitical map thanks to the rise and advance of the Communists in Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia. Indonesia in particular was a growing concern thanks to the size of the Indonesian Communist Party PKI – which by then was said to be the third largest in the world. The fact that Indonesia's President Sukarno was happy to be photographed in the company of people like Kruschev and Castro did not assuage the concern of business elites in the financial capitals of Western Europe and North America either. Nor did this allay the fears of Malaya's own political elite, for Tunku and his government were likewise committed to the eradication of the Malayan Communists at home.

The plan to create a wider Federation of Malaysia, that would include Malaya as well as the states of Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak, was a complex issue for PAS to deal with. For it presented the party and its leaders with a curious dilemma: On the one hand, men like Burhanuddin had, for decades, campaigned for closer integration among the former colonised communities of Southeast Asia with the intention of bringing closer together nations that had been torn apart by colonialism. But on the other hand he was himself critical of the Malayan government, which he regarded as being led by neo-colonial pro-Western elites such as Tunku. What he hoped for was a remembering of Southeast Asia where the peoples of the region would regain their lost sense of unity and shared identity, without a single state dominating others. As he had said himself earlier:

> There is no plausible reason why our desire to maintain a closer relationship with Indonesia should be subject to such vile attacks. The Malay and Indonesian people come from the same stock and thus it is natural for them to want to come closer, to be united. This aspiration has a long history, ever since we and the Indonesians came under the yoke of foreign rule, of European imperialism. This is the aspiration for which we have been fighting. But it is not yet known as to what form the unity and consolidation of Malaya and Indonesia might be, when it finally materialises. Only let me say loudly and strongly that whatever form it may be, it will neither result in bringing Malaya under the rule of Indonesia or vice-versa… Thus if Malaya in the not too distant future wishes to have a special link, a special form of solidarity and friend-

> ship with Indonesia, this process cannot and should not be regarded as contradictory to the historical development of the two nations. Our relation with Indonesia should be strengthened in all phases of our life: political, economical, social and cultural because this relationship is demanded by historical reality.[72]

On 15 July 1963, PAS Parliamentarians staged a protest against Tunku's plans to create the Malaysian Federation in Parliament, but to no avail. On 16 September 1963, the Federation of Malaysia was born, and Malaysia braced itself for a confrontation with Indonesia and the Philippines which both rejected the Malaysian Federation idea on account of it being a 'neo-colonial Western plot' to divide and rule Southeast Asia all over again.

The confrontation with Indonesia (dubbed the *Konfrontasi*) lasted from 1963 to 1965 and witnessed several attempts by Indonesian paramilitary forces to enter and destabilise parts of Malaysia. Several armed incursions were made in to Sarawak and Peninsula Malaysia, but by then the new Malaysian Federation was being supported by its Western allies and thus able to fend off most of the attacks. It was Indonesia that in the end bore the brunt of the costs of the adventure: by 1965, inflation in Indonesia had risen to more than 600% and the economy was spiraling out of control. Sukarno's decision to go to war against Malaysia led to massive capital flight from Indonesia, which wrecked the economy even further. Malaysia, on the other hand, received support from the West and the conflict only brought the country even closer to the Western bloc. The confrontation also failed to create a popular movement in Malaysia against the leadership of Tunku Abdul Rahman, something which Sukarno and the Indonesian Communists desperately wanted. In the end, the conflict was terminated by 1965 when the failed GESTAPU revolt led to elimination of the PKI and Communist sympathisers across the country and the rise of General Suharto.

During this troubled episode, PAS found itself caught between a rock and a hard place. PAS's leaders were unwilling to support the government of Tunku, and at the 12th PAS General Assembly in 1964 Dr. Burhanuddin openly condemned Tunku's policy against Indonesia. PAS leaders were incensed by the government's willingness to accept military support from Western powers like Britain and other Commonwealth countries during the conflict. At the same time, PAS could not openly endorse Indonesia's

72 Dr. Burhanuddin's acceptance speech, 1956. Quoted in PAS *dalam Arus Perjuangan Kemerdekaan*, p. 83.

blatant acts of aggression against Malaysia that were endangering the lives of Malaysian citizens and the newly minted Federation, either.

PAS paid a heavy price for taking the stand that it did during the confrontation with Indonesia. Though men like Burhanuddin, Dr. Zulkiflee and Asri Muda considered themselves Pan-Islamists who cherished their bonds of solidarity with the Muslims of Indonesia, they were turning against the tide of popular opinion in the country, which saw the confrontation as an act of aggression by Indonesia against Malaysia, goaded by Indonesian Communists like D.N. Aidit who had Sukarno under their thumb. Little sympathy was extended to the leftists in Indonesia when, in the 1965 putsch against the Communists, tens of thousands of Leftist sympathisers were rounded up, detained, exiled or killed. At the elections of 1964, PAS paid the price for its commitment to Pan-Islamism.

At the elections of 22 March 1964, 78.9% of voters came out to cast their ballots. PAS earned 14.6% of the vote and won 9 seats (8.7% of seats) in parliament. (The party had contested 52 seats.) Its share of state assembly seats also dropped considerably, from 42 (in 1959) to 25. Eight of PAS's parliamentary seats were in Kelantan; the remaining one was in Terengganu. Dr. Burhanuddin could not stand in the election as he had been barred by the electoral commission on the grounds that he was implicated in a failed business venture. While PAS was finding itself marginalised in constituencies all over the country, its allies in the PRM were also being put under pressure. Because of the anti-communist hysteria whipped up during *Konfrontasi*, many socialist movements and organisations were placed under surveillance.

Compounding PAS's problems, it suffered another setback soon after. Less than two months after the 1964 election, the Islamist party lost its vice president, Ustaz Zulkiflee Muhammad, who passed away in a car accident along with his wife Ustazah Aishah on 6 May 1964.[73] Dr. Zulkiflee's unexpected death was a major blow to the Islamists in PAS. He had served as the vice president of the party for eight years, and his writings and speeches had helped to develop the party's Islamist philosophy to a great extent. For many party members, Dr. Zulkiflee had been the 'spiritual pillar' who stood by the 'political pillar' of the party, Dr. Burhanuddin. He died as he had lived, as an Islamist activist. In his final moments, Dr. Zulkiflee spoke about his project to launch an Islamic educational foundation at Nilam Puri and the

73 Dr. Zulkiflee and his wife Ustazah Aishah were killed when their car was hit head-on by another vehicle. Ustazah Aishah died on the spot, while Dr. Zulkiflee passed away on his way to hospital (Re: Ibnu Hasyim, *PAS Kuasai Malaysia?*, p. 202).

need to build an Islamic university in the country. Years later, Dr. Zulkiflee's dreams came to fruition when the *Ma'ahad ad-Dakwah wal-Imamah Nilam Puri* was finally built.[74] With the passing of Dr. Zulkiflee the post of party vice president went to Kelantanese leader Mohammad Asri Muda, who was already the PAS chief minister of Kelantan.

By then PAS was also being demonised as a pro-Left Islamist party that was secretly working hand-in-glove with anti-state elements in and outside Malaysia. In January 1965, the party suffered another major loss when Dr. Burhanuddin was detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA). Burhanuddin and another prominent PAS leader, Dato' Raja Abu Hanifa, were accused of being pro-Indonesian collaborators working against their own country and of wanting to set up a government in exile in Algiers[75] (or the Islamic Republic of Pakistan according to other sources).[76] A government white paper published in that year claimed that the PAS leadership had received US$105,000 from Indonesian agents for use in the campaign to undermine the effort to create the Malaysian Federation in 1963. Dr. Burhanuddin's early speeches (where he openly declared support for the Indonesian nationalists) were cited as proof of his pro-Indonesian sympathies and revolutionary tendencies.

With Dr. Zulkiflee gone and Dr. Burhanuddin in prison, PAS was left to flounder over the next few years. The events of 1963 to 1966 had sparked off an existential crisis within the party itself, which was now forced to address the question of what PAS's Islamism stood for, and what it hoped to achieve. PAS was undoubtedly an Islamist party, and had never compromised on its call for the establishment of an Islamic state in Malaysia. But the party and its members remained vague in their outline for what such an Islamic state would look like, and how it would be different from any other state-model such as the one being attempted by the Alliance government.

The confrontation with Indonesia – and PAS's support of the Indonesian nationalists – was perhaps an attempt to outline what the party meant by its own sense of Muslim solidarity that transcended political borders, and its call for a greater Pan-Muslim solidarity among Southeast Asians. But coming as it did at a time when the Malaysian Federation was in its

74 Ma'ahad ad-Dakwah wal-Imamah Nilam Puri became one of PAS's flagships of success, and it was built entirely with state funds collected by the PAS government of Kelantan. (Re: *Jenayah Akademik Pemimpin UMNO: PAS Menjawab Pembohongan Mahathir*, Klang: Pencetakan As Saff, 1995, p. 85.)

75 Alias Mohamed, *Malaysia's Islamic Opposition: Past, Present and Future*, Kuala Lumpur: Gateway Publishing, 1991, p. 28.

76 Ahmad Boestaman, *Dr. Burhanuddin*, p. 67.

infancy, and when it was obvious to all that Indonesia's opposition towards the Malaysian Federation was inspired more by the ambitions of the Indonesian Communists rather than Indonesian nationalists, it drove a wedge between PAS and its own electorate in Malaysia. PAS's members may have welcomed the idea of a closer bond with their fellow Muslims in Indonesia (and elsewhere in the Muslim world), but it would have been doubtful that they would have welcomed Indonesian Communist insurgents landing on their shores with the intention of attacking and destroying the new Malaysian state in the name of anti-colonialism and the struggle against Western hegemony. PAS's gamble had not paid off, and it became clear that the newly demarcated borders between the Federation of Malaysia and the Republic of Indonesia were to stay for good.

It was against this context of popular anxiety and confusion that Malaysia went to the polls again in 1969, after Singapore had left the Malaysian Federation and 'Malaysia' was reduced to the Malaysian Peninsula and the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. Due to the negative impact of the commodity crisis (1956-70), the growing government deficit (incurred as a result of the government's decision to maintain a high level of public expenditure) and the growing rate of unemployment (7% in 1967/68),[77] the Alliance government was seen to be standing on shaky ground.

The election campaign of 1969 was a particularly nasty one, with PAS leaders taking every opportunity to stab at the image and reputation of Tunku whom they derided as a 'secular, Westernised' elite and aristocrat. As PAS began to up the stakes in the Islamisation race once again, the government responded with its own Islamic programmes and policies. In April 1969, just one month before the election, Malaysia hosted the International Islamic Conference with 23 countries in attendance. The conference was well publicised and the pro-establishment media claimed that it was yet another example of how the Malaysian government had succeeded in its efforts to promote and defend the interests of Islam and Muslims worldwide. Tunku claimed that 'it was, of course, a coincidence that this conference should take place during the election campaign'.[78] His opponents in the Islamist camp had, understandably, an entirely different view. The growing antagonism between the government and the opposition parties had begun to get out of control by then. On 24 April 1969, a UMNO worker, Kassim Omar, was killed by members of the opposition. On 4 May

77 Okposin and Cheng, *Economic Crises in Malaysia*, p. 63.
78 Ibid., pp. 38-39.

of the same year, an opposition party worker, Lim Soon Seng, was killed by the police when he and other activists resisted attempts to disperse them.

Elections were held on 10 May 1969 and the voter turnout dropped once again, to 73.6%. The Alliance fared poorly because of the growing unpopularity of Tunku among the Malays, internal conflicts within UMNO, MCA's loss of credibility among the Chinese electorate and the open tension between the Malay and Chinese élite within the Alliance. The Alliance's share of the vote plummeted to 44.9%, making this the first minority government in Malaysian history. However, the coalition was saved by the electoral system that gave them 74 seats (51.4% of seats) in parliament.

PAS won 20.9% of the votes and 12 seats (8.3% of seats) in parliament: seven in Kelantan, two in Terengganu and three in Kedah (PAS contested 59 seats). PAS also won 40 state assembly seats, most in the northern states. Though he had been released from detention in 1967, Burhanuddin could not take active part in the campaigning process because his health had deteriorated badly while in custody. As always, PAS's biggest gains were in the north. In Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis and Kedah, the party's share of the votes was 52.2, 49.4, 43.8 and 41.3%, respectively. Overall, the party won 501,123 votes (20.9% of total votes). The biggest surprise, however, was that PAS managed to break UMNO's hold on Kedah. PAS had never won any seats in the state before, but in the 1969 election it won 3 out of 12 parliamentary seats and 8 out of 24 state assembly seats. Its share of the vote in Kedah also rose to 41.3%. More significant was the Islamists' defeat of three major UMNO candidates: Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (defeated by his distant relative Ustaz Yusof Rawa by 989 votes), UMNO secretary-general Senu Abdul Rahman (defeated by PAS candidate Ustaz Abu Bakar Umar by 88 votes) and Zahir Ismail (defeated by Haji Mawardi Lebai Teh by 1,689 votes). The Islamists even came close to unseating Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman (whose majority was halved by PAS candidate Aziz Abdullah). In the wake of the election, UMNO leaders were quick to blame PAS for their electoral misfortunes. Tunku identified PAS as one of the main reasons why UMNO did badly, claiming that PAS had endeavoured to break up the Malay community and, by doing so, put in jeopardy the economic and political lot of the Malays as a whole.[79]

79 In his last speech as president of his party on 22 September 1970, Tunku claimed that PAS had deliberately entered into the 1969 electoral race in some marginal constituencies to ensure that UMNO would lose the seats. Though PAS did not win these seats, Tunku claimed that the move had served the interests of PAS because it led to more losses for UMNO and the ruling Alliance. (Re: Tunku Abdul Rahman, *Detik Sejarah 22 September 1970*, Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Melayu Press, 1970, pp. 27-28.)

UMNO was not the only party of the Alliance that did badly. Its ally the MCA also suffered losses to two new non-Malay parties that had emerged on the Malaysian political scene: the Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the Gerakan party. By 1969, the pattern was set: Malaysian politics would remain race-based, and ethnic and religious communities would vote for parties that reflected their own exclusive ethnic-religious interests.

Days after the elections, on 13 May 1969, ethnic riots broke out in the cosmopolitan urban centres of Peninsular Malaysia, notably in places like Kuala Lumpur. The 13 May race riots eventually led to the declaration of a state of national emergency where Parliament was suspended and the country came under the direction of the National Operations Council (NOC), with the army and police force playing a visible role in the restoration of law and order. By then, the conflict between PAS and UMNO had taken its toll and the leaders of both parties were spent. Dr. Burhanuddin was by then gravely ill. His stay in prison had further aggravated his medical condition. He finally passed away peacefully on 25 October 1969, at the age of 58, leaving behind him scores of loyal followers and admirers who had followed him to the end. Asri Muda then became PAS's fourth president. The following year, in 1970, Tunku himself was forced to step down to make way for a new generation of leaders in UMNO. The man who had spent so many years of his life trying to prevent his country from falling into the hands of the Islamists and Communists was then chosen to become, of all things, the first secretary general of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).[80]

With the passing of both Dr. Burhanuddin and Dr. Zulkiflee, PAS's experiment with left-leaning Islamist politics had come to an end. Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy was very much a man of his time. His contemporaries were Third World leaders such as Gammel Nasser, Sukarno, Patrice Lumumba and Kwame Nkrumah. His fate was also similar to theirs: while Lumumba was assassinated and Nkrumah was deposed in a CIA-sponsored coup, Burhanuddin fell victim to the political realities of the time that divided the world into Eastern and Western blocs, with little space in between for

80 Tunku became the first secretary-general of the OIC shortly after it was established in 1969; he served from 1970-72. Tunku was personally suggested by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, who felt that he was the least controversial leader in the Muslim world at the time. As a Malay, Tunku was not directly involved in, or partisan to, any of the conflicts simmering in the Arab world. However, Tunku was hampered in his task by the lack of organisational structure within the OIC. The organisation was still new and did not have proper institutional support. In 1972, the post of secretary general of the OIC went to the vice president of Egypt, Hasan Tohamy, who nominated himself at the OIC assembly. Tunku spent the rest of his life in Malaysia as an active participant in Malaysian politics. He died in Kuala Lumpur on 6 December 1990.

the discourse of progressive Islam to emerge. Though PAS had scored some electoral success (notably at the elections of 1959 and 1969), the dream of creating a Pan-Islamic alliance between Malaysia and Indonesia was over, as was Sukarno's dream of a 'Greater Indonesia-Raya'.

Under the leadership of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, PAS developed into an Islamist party that was both nationalist and anti-colonialist in its outlook. Unlike the UMNO nationalists who saw the problems of the Malay-Muslims mainly in terms of interethnic competition, Dr. Burhanuddin attempted to explain the dilemma of the Malay-Muslims in terms of class conflict and contradictions in the economic and political system installed by the departing colonial powers. It was the radical nationalists of the Leftist-Islamist camp who had managed to make Islam a national political issue and related it to the broader struggle for political independence and economic rights. The political philosophy of Dr. Burhanuddin also stood in stark contrast to the position held by the later leaders of PAS. The PAS leadership had openly committed the party to the struggle for an Islamic state, but the party's president grafted together elements of Islamist, nationalist, Socialist and reformist thought in keeping with the intellectual current in the post-colonial world. Unlike the conservative ulama, Burhanuddin did not resort to the use of sanctimonious religious phrases or obscure esoteric terms to beguile his followers and opponents alike. Ahmad Boestaman once described Dr. Burhanuddin as the only Malayan Islamist leader who did not use the language of the '*fanatik agama*' (religious fanatic).[81] But struggling as they did in a postcolonial world that was split apart by the oppositional logic of the Cold War, men like Burhanuddin and Dr. Zulkiflee were caught between competing loyalties: to the state, to their religion, and to their global Ummah. Their failure signalled not the end of political Islam per se, but the end of a Pan-Islamism that sought to undo the borders that had been set up during the colonial era. The age of the totalising nation-state was clearly not over, yet.

81 In his biography of Dr. Burhanuddin, Ahmad Boestaman (*Dr. Burhanuddin*, p. 8) recalls the confrontation between Dr. Burhanuddin and the first leader of the PKMM, the communist Mokhtaruddin Lasso. When Mokhtaruddin confronted Dr. Burhanuddin over the question of the existence of God, Dr. Burhanuddin's reply was rational and to the point. Boestaman noted that in his rebuttal of Lasso, Dr. Burhanuddin never once resorted to the use of religious *fatwa*, edicts or quotes from the *Qur'an* – something which impressed Boestaman considerably. Boestaman also noted that had Mokhtaruddin Lasso tried to confront a member of the traditional ulama in the same way, he would probably have met a violent end at the hands of the '*lebai kolot*' (conservative religious scholar) or '*fanatik agama*' (religious fanatic).

Elsewhere in the Muslim world, other grand attempts at national liberation had likewise faltered; the political defeat of the Arab Muslim states during the Six-Day War of 1967 added to the demoralisation of many Arab secular nationalists (and the rise of even more militant Islamist organisations like the *Jama'at al-Jihad*, *Takfir wa'l-Hijrah* and *Shabab Muhammad*), and forced Arab-Muslim intellectuals worldwide to consider the roots of Muslim political weakness and vulnerability in the present. Mosaddegh of Iran had been deposed and the Shah had taken the country on the path of Westernisation instead. Nasser's Pan-Arab alliance had likewise failed, and in his wake Anwar Sadat would open up the economy of Egypt to Western investment and American pop culture, contributing to a new era of upward social mobility that would, ironically, also fuel the eventual Islamisation of Egyptian society.

For the next twelve years, however, Malaysia's own Islamic party would come under the leadership of Asri Muda, who would take PAS on the path of ethno-nationalism instead. Islamism would take a back seat for more than a decade, until the resurgence of political Islam in the 1980s would take the country by storm. For now, however, PAS was left in the doldrums of finding a new course for itself.

2 From Internationalism to Communitarianism

PAS as the Defender of Malay Rights: 1970-1982

> Today when we look at the fate of the Malays we see that we have become like chickens that are dying of hunger in a field of rice, like ducks that are dying of thirst while surrounded by water. Our country is so rich, so prosperous, yet a large section of Malay society remains oppressed, neglected and left behind.
>
> Mohammad Asri Muda, Speech at the 17th PAS Congress, 18 June 1971

From Internationalism to Localism: PAS's Inward Turn in the 1970s

The demise of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy brought to an end the 'internationalist' period of PAS, when the party saw itself as one among many Islamist movements worldwide that were working together in the spirit of postcolonial resistance against neo-colonialism and Western hegemony. That political Islam in Malaysia assumed this stance was hardly a surprise considering the availability of the vocabulary and discourse of Islam, and the fact that all across Asia the nascent postcolonial movements that had come to power were still busied with the task of undoing the mental, economic and political shackles of colonialism.

PAS in Malaysia was therefore not a unique phenomenon then, and its struggle was not a singular one either: from Indonesia to Egypt to Iran to Pakistan, Muslim societies were grappling with the dilemma of how to construct a postcolonial Modernity that was on the one hand modern and at the same time authentically local – at times couched in terms that were ethno-culturally essentialist and reductivist.

As I have argued earlier, PAS's failure to seize the state and to win over the support of the majority of Malayans was not entirely the result of the weaknesses of the discourse of Islamism per se, but also a reflection of the realpolitik of the time, shaped by external variable factors that were beyond the party's control. While the universal appeal and outlook of PAS's Islamism tapped into the *collective* aspirations of Muslims at home and abroad, it was unfortunately articulated in the context of a new and vulnerable nation-state whose borders were being challenged from its inception by hostile neighbours. Talk of fluid and porous borders is easy in the context of older, established states, but less so in the case of new polities

whose borders were being violated by armed insurgents from neighbouring countries.

Also undermining PAS's universalism was its attempt to position and present itself as a defender of class interests at a time when Malaya (and later Malaysia) was still literally in a state of emergency and engaged in a prolonged war in the countryside against Communist insurgents whose own commitment to the class struggle was less guided by the Quran and more by the dictates of Moscow and Beijing. PAS therefore found itself in a difficult position as it tried to defend its class-based approach to Islamist politics when its own discourse bore uncomfortable similarities with that of the radical Communists of the MCP and its guerilla wing.

Compounding PAS's difficulties even further was the fact that Malaysia was born at the peak of the Cold War when the countries of Southeast Asia were being forced to take sides in the clash between the Western and Eastern blocs. Amongst the various ethnic and religious communities of Malaysia then, whatever resentment that was felt against the recent memory of colonialism and Empire took a back seat as the even greater fear of Communism loomed large. Malaysians may have shared the dream of national emancipation, but certainly not at the cost of having their political liberties surrendered before the altar of the Communist Internationale. As such, when PAS bore the brunt of the Malaysian state's sustained critique against the Communists and their allies – real and imagined – little sympathy was shown to PAS leaders who had been accused of being leftist sympathisers or, worse still, partisan to Indonesia's aggressive posturing towards Malaysia.

All of this was set to change by the 1970s, as PAS came under the leadership of its new – and fourth – president, Mohammad Asri Muda, who took over the party in 1970, the same year that Hafız al-Assad launched the bloodless coup that brought him to power in Syria. The 'Asri years' were perhaps the most problematic episode in the development of PAS and even today the party remains unable to come to terms with some of the policy shifts and reversals introduced by its fourth president.[1] Like his predecessors Dr. Burhanuddin and Dr. Zulkiflee, Asri Muda developed the party and guided its orientation according to his own personal beliefs and worldview.

1 The author was present at the PAS annual general assembly (*muktamar am*) in Kuala Lumpur on 25 May 1999. During the opening session, party president Ustaz Fadzil Noor read a prayer of thanks to the previous leaders. The names of Haji Ahmad Fuad, Dr. Abbas Elias, Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Dr. Zulkiflee Muhammad and Ahmad Zawawi Hamzah were mentioned, but not Mohammad Asri Muda. Many contemporary scholars of PAS politics have noted the extent to which the memory of Asri Muda's leadership has been wiped out of the party's official archives and records as well as propaganda material.

Three observations can be made about PAS and its leaders at this point.

The first is that by the 1970s, PAS's internal organisational structure had developed to the point where the party was no longer the loosely defined entity that it was in the early 1950s. PAS had, by then, developed a network of branches all over the Malaysian Peninsula – though its presence in the Eastern states of Sabah and Sarawak in East Malaysia paled in comparison, then. The party had also evolved a pyramidal leadership structure where the party's ideological and political orientation was being set by the leadership of the party. This meant that contestation for posts within PAS had intensified, and that members were increasingly keen to rise upwards in the party's structure as it afforded a new means of upward social mobility that was hitherto unknown to many of them. As PAS's fortunes waxed and waned, so was the party increasingly seen as a vehicle for social mobility and an opportunity for individual members to rise to the stage of national politics, raising themselves from the relatively obscure origins in whatever locality they came from.

The second observation relates to Asri Muda himself, who was in some respects a very different sort of leader compared to the earlier leaders of PAS. Unlike Dr. Abbas Elias, Dr. Burhanuddin and Dr. Zulkiflee, Asri was a local hero born and bred in Malaysia. His education was confined to religious and Malay vernacular schools in the country and during his formative years his only international exposure was to Indonesia – a country that bore many cultural, linguistic and historical similarities to Malaysia. He had not travelled or worked abroad, and did not have the wider global worldview of the likes of Burhanuddin. Asri's worldview was confined to the Malay Archipelago, which stretched from Southern Thailand to Timor and Southern Philippines at best. If Burhanuddin's speeches were littered with references to Egypt, Palestine, Iran and even Cuba, Asri's speeches were filled with homely references to the Malay world and the Malay community primarily.

The third observation follows from the second: If Asri saw himself (and was seen by others) as a Malay nationalist first and foremost, this was also reflected in his obvious hostility to the other communities in the country, and his pathological dislike of Communism and other left-leaning ideologies which he regarded as foreign and alien to Malay society. Dr. Burhanuddin had, as we have seen, tried to tie together the vessels of the Islamist party and their leftist allies in Malaysia in the 1960s, but during Asri's time, PAS turned out to become one of the most vocal critics of the radical Left and the Malayan Communist Party in particular. The left-leaning years of PAS were decidedly over, and the 1970s would witness the rise of an inward-looking

PAS that would instead be the most vocal champion of Malay rights, identity and culture in Malaysia.

Mohammad Asri Muda was born on 10 October 1923 in Kampung Masjid, Kota Bharu, Kelantan, and received his early education at a number of vernacular Malay and religious schools there. Immediately after the Second World War he made his first foray into the world of politics by helping to form the *Persekutuan Persetiaan Melayu Kelantan* (Union of Kelantan Malay Loyalists, PPMK) dominated by conservative nationalists. But Asri's politics was of a much more radical tenor than the conservative-loyalists of the PPMK. He left the PPMK and soon he and his brother, Saad Shukri Muda, joined the ranks of the radical Malay nationalists of the PKMM under the leadership of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy and Ishak Haji Muhammad. Asri served as the editor of the PKMM's Malay-language journal, *Penyedar*, and was also involved in the radical activities of the PKMM's youth wing, API, then led by Ahmad Boestaman. A staunch defender of the Malay language, Asri later formed and led the *Lembaga Pembangunan Sastera* (Society for the Development of Malay Literature, LEPAS) in Perak in 1952.[2] In the same year, he attended the first Congress of Malay Letters (*Kongres Bahasa dan Persuratan*) in Singapore and in 1954 he represented LEPAS at the *Kongres Bahasa Indonesia* in Medan, Indonesia. His zealous defence and promotion of the Malay language gained him a large following among the Malay and Indonesian vernacular press and intelligentsia. Those who heard him speak were impressed with the style of his oratory and delivery. PAS leader Mohamad Sabu once said of Asri: '*So great was his style of speaking that Asri could stop a bird in flight and freeze flowing water.*'[3]

Asri's big break came when he later joined PAS and was given the task of laying down PAS's membership network in the northern Malay-majority states of Kelantan and Trengganu. Kelantan was always known as a centre of Islamic learning and Malay cultural activity, earning it the reputation of being both the heart of Malay culture in the peninsula and the *serambi* Mekah (the 'porch of Mecca'). A long-standing tradition of Islamic activism had been set by an earlier generation of Islamist reformers such as Haji Mahmood Ismail, Tok Kenali and Haji Muhammad bin Said in the 1920s.[4] By the closing stages of the Second World War, the state capital was already full of disaffected Malay radicals and nationalists who were talking of independence.

2 Bachtiar Djamily, *Kenapa PAS Boleh Jadi PAS?*, Petaling Jaya: Cerma Rafleswaty, 1976, p. 4.

3 Quoted in *Tamadun*, August 1999, p. 37.

4 Wan Nik bin Wan Yusoff, 'PAS Mula Ditubuh di Kelantan', p. 3. From the homepage of Dewan Ulama of PAS, PAS Kelantan Strategic Centre (Pusat Kajian Strategik Kelantan), 26 November 1997.

With the help of Bustamin Ismail and Mohd Daud bin Salleh, Asri quickly set up a PAS branch in Kelantan. They did this entirely by themselves, relying on their own funds and ingenuity. Bustamin and Mohd Daud helped to collect donations from the local residents, while Asri organised talks and rallies to drum up support. Help also came from other PAS activists such as Amaluddin Darus, Omar bin Yusuf, Ustaz Abdullah Ahmad, Mohd Amin Yaakob, Ishak Lotfi bin Omar (later Dato' Ishak Lotfi) and Abdul Rahman Sulong. Due to their persistence and combined efforts, the first Kelantan branch of PAS was established in Kota Bharu in 1952. On 23 July 1953, PAS claimed the constituency of Pasir Mas as its first target for the upcoming election. Asri and his followers then began forming branches all over the state: Macang (1953), Kota Bharu (1954), Pasir Putih (1954), Tanah Merah (1955), Ulu Kelantan, Bachok (1956), Kuala Kerai (1958) and Tumpat (1959). The party leaders were duly impressed by the energy and commitment of Asri Muda, who had set up so many party branches in an underdeveloped state cut off from the rest of the peninsula.

Thanks to his success as a campaigner and propagandist, Asri was seen as one of the 'rising stars' of PAS in the 1950s. Though only in his late twenties, his reputation in Kelantan meant that he commanded considerable respect and clout within the party. He had become so influential that in 1953 he was one of three PAS members chosen to represent the party at the *Persidangan Kebangsaan* (National Assembly) jointly organised by PAS's rivals UMNO and MCA to debate proposals for the model of self-rule to be instituted once the British colonial authorities had granted independence to Malaya.[5] For his part in furthering the cause of PAS, Asri was promoted to the status of *pesuruhjaya persatuan* in charge of PAS activities in Kelantan and Terengganu in 1955. However, his ambition to rise higher in the party's leadership strata was checked by the sudden entry of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, who was invited to take over the party leadership by its second president, Dr. Abbas Elias, in 1956. As a result, Asri found his own avenues for advancement were effectively blocked. Henceforth, the marginalised Asri concentrated most of his efforts on the northern states of Kelantan and Terengganu, which became the base of his operations in the following years.

Having won over both the ordinary Malays as well as the traditional *gurus* and *imams* of the pondoks and madrasahs of Kelantan and Trengganu, Asri Muda became the undisputed leader of PAS in the northeast. Much of PAS's success in Kelantan has to be attributed to the efforts of Asri Muda, whose

5 *PAS dalam Arus Perjuangan Kemerdekaan*, Selangor: Panel Pengkaji Sejarah, Pusat Penyelidikan PAS, Angkatan Edaran, 1999, p. 10.

charisma and charm were crucial to winning over the hearts and minds of the people. So strong was this hold on the mindset of the northeastern Malays that, though the party performed badly in the 1955 election, PAS secured solid victories for itself in Kelantan in the elections of 1959, 1964 and 1969.

In 1964-65, two major developments shaped the political career of Asri for good. First, he was made the chief minister (*Menteri Besar*) of Kelantan after the 1964 elections. The Sultan of Kelantan then conferred upon him the honorific title of 'Datuk' (meaning 'elder'; or literally, 'grandfather'). No other PAS leader could mount a challenge on Asri's leadership in the state, knowing that his network of connections and grassroots support was so strong. Second, Asri was finally given the opportunity to take over the leadership of PAS in 1964 when the party lost its vice president, Dr. Zulkiflee, who died in a car accident. Less than a year later, Asri became the de facto leader of PAS when its president, Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, was detained under the Internal Security Act (in January 1965) while Malaysia was engaged in its *Konfrontasi* with Indonesia.

While serving as chief minister of Kelantan, Asri committed the party and its leadership to a number of contentious issues; some of which were politically sensitive and would later backfire on the party. One of the more litigious causes he championed was that of the Patani liberation movement, then operating along the Malaysia-Thailand border. Groups like the *Barisan Nasional Pembebasan Patani* (National Liberation Front of Patani, BNPP) and the *Barisan Revolusi Nasional* (National Revolutionary Front, BRN) were already active in the region and had operatives working in Malaysia. In time, other organisations like the *Pertubuhan Perpaduan Pembebasan Patani* (Patani United Liberation Organisation, PULO) also entered the fray. Asri's support for the Patani Malay-Muslims was part of his own Malaycentric nationalism aimed at defending the interests of all Malay-Muslims. However his open support for the Patani liberation movement and its guerrilla fighters also became an obstacle in the development of Malaysia-Thai relations and a cause of worry for the government. As the Patani guerrillas were operating in the same areas as the outlawed MCP guerrillas, the party was exposed to the accusation that it was indirectly helping the communist insurgents who were at war with the Malaysian state.[6]

Asri courted the most controversy and deprecation in the area of economic management and finance. His running of the Kelantan economy did

6 Alias Mohamed, 'The Pan Malaysian Islamic Party: A Critical Observation', in *Southeast Asian Affairs*, Singapore: Institute for Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS), 1978, pp. 167-168.

not exactly match his skills as an orator and polemicist. By the late 1960s, a number of financial scandals had erupted in Kelantan, many inevitably linked to Asri himself. In May 1967, Asri was forced to admit in parliament that the Kelantan government had borrowed RM5 million from commercial banks to pay for state expenditures. In December 1967, Asri had to beg for a RM1.5-million loan from the federal government to pay the wages of government servants in the state. In 1968, Asri admitted that his state government was once again in debt – this time to the tune of RM10 million.

In May 1969, PAS scored one of its most impressive electoral victories in the general election. PAS once again triumphed in the northeastern states of Kelantan and Terengganu. The election campaign witnessed the Alliance's use of all the resources and tools at its disposal, leading to a pre-election promise to the people of Kelantan of a massive RM546-million investment package. As soon as Alliance leaders made their offer public, Asri assumed the moral high ground above his opponents, accusing them of trying to buy over the people of Kelantan. His rejection of the Alliance's proposal was intended to bolster the pride of the Kelantanese in themselves, and was also couched in Islamist terms, as Kessler (1978) points out:

> The Alliance, Asri suggested, was seeking to satisfy its inordinate desire for power by appealing to the tenuously controlled wishes of the Kelantanese for worldly goods and comforts. Those who had succumbed to such temptation, who had allowed the Alliance to put a price on them, were now worthless. They had neither value nor values. But the Kelantanese, because they still retained their own values, had refused the Alliance's price. … Recognising the self-interest in the Alliance's purported benevolence, they knew their opponents were inauthentic, insincere and untrustworthy.[7]

In the end, Asri outmanoeuvred the Alliance leadership by representing their pre-election promises as temptations intended to weaken the *iman* (faith) of the Kelantanese. Asri's appeal to early Islamic precedents not only painted the election campaign in an epic hue, it also helped the party maintain its hold on Kelantan. With Kelantan as his base of operations, Asri prepared himself for the eventuality of leading the country's only Islamist opposition party in 1970.

7 Clive Kessler, *Islam and Malay Politics in a Malay State: Kelantan 1938-1969,* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978, p. 225.

At the 17th annual congress of PAS in 1970, Asri Muda was made the president of the party. The vice presidency of the party went to Asri's associate Hasan Adli Arshat, a long-time party activist who also enjoyed considerable support in the north.[8]

From the moment he took over the Islamist party, Asri began to sound the warning call that the Malays were in danger. The speech he delivered at the congress painted a bleak picture of the state of the Malays in their own country:

> The leaders of the ruling Alliance have themselves admitted that the remnants of the old colonial policies of the past that were responsible for keeping the Malays so far behind are still at work in this country. They themselves admit that despite their efforts and policies they have not been able to improve the condition of the Malays and the other indigenous races in the country. Today when we look at the fate of the Malays we see that we have become like chickens that are dying of hunger in a field of rice, like ducks that are dying of thirst while surrounded by water. Our country is so rich, so prosperous, yet a large section of Malay society remains oppressed, neglected and left behind.[9]

Asri's communitarianism was born out of an anxiety to protect the existence of the Malay-Muslim constituency itself. After the boom and bust cycles of the 1950s and 1960s, the Malaysian economy seemed to be in danger of falling into a major slump with unemployment levels rising alarmingly high among the Malay-Muslims in particular. Apart from the structural problems within the economy, the Malays were forced to contend with increased competition from the other communities. By 1970, the Malays (who numbered 4,886,912 citizens) made up less than half (46.8%) of the population of Malaysia. Apart from being reduced to a minority in the country, the Malays also began to realise that their economic standing had deteriorated since the time of independence.

8 Hasan Adli Arshat was born in 1929 in Bagan Datok, Perak. He was educated at *Madrasah Darul 'Ulum*. Prior to entering politics he worked as a journalist and wrote about issues related to Malay-Muslim concerns. He later joined PAS and was awarded the title *Panglima Jihad* (Commander of Jihad) at the 1958 PAS annual congress. In 1964, he was awarded the *Sri Pendidik* prize for Islamic literature at the Perak Islamic Teachers Conference. He travelled widely all over the world as a representative of the party, visiting India (1961) and Indonesia (1963) and taking part in the Afro-Asian Journalists Conference in Bandung (1963). In the 1970s, he grew further and further apart from Asri's leadership because of the corruption scandals surrounding the leader.

9 Asri Muda, opening speech at the 17th congress of PAS, 18 June 1971, p. 4.

While class, rather than ethnicity, was the real reason for these discrepancies, it was nonetheless believed that the economic lot of the Malays was made worse because of the encroachment of the non-Malays. The overall level of Malay equity ownership in the country was also staggeringly small. As Jomo has noted, prior to 1969, Malays and 'Malay interests' owned only 1.5% of all share capital of limited companies in the peninsula, while collective Chinese and Indian ownership accounted for 22.8% and 0.9%, respectively.[10] The rest of the country's economy remained in the hands of foreign (i.e., Western) companies and conglomerates. Collectively, the Malays were behind the Chinese community as well as foreign capital interests in the country.

Asri's constant attacks on the UMNO-led Alliance government's record in the area of cultural and language development was one of the factors that put UMNO on the defensive and forced the government of the Tunku (and, later, Tun Razak) to act. In 1970, under pressure from PAS and the other defenders of the Malay language and culture, the government implemented the National Education Policy that made the promotion of the Malay language one of its key objectives. In 1971, Tun Razak followed this up with the *Kongres Kebudayaan Kebangsaan* (National Culture Congress) that paved the way for the Malaysian National Culture Policy which also privileged Malay culture and identity above others.

Looking at the Malaysian situation from a broader perspective, Asri Muda was keenly aware of the progress achieved elsewhere by other Islamist movements and parties. He lamented the apparent inertia of the Islamist movement in Malaysia compared to the more spectacular and turbulent developments elsewhere in the Islamic world. The 1970s was a time when Islamist movements and governments the world over were embarking on a number of grand projects and programmes directly or indirectly shaped by the worldview and values of Islam. In Indonesia, the Islamist movements that had played an active role in literally wiping out the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) were then clamouring for more political representation in the *Orde Baru* (New Order) regime of President Suharto. In the Philippines, the lot of the Moro Muslims of Mindanao improved somewhat when they formed the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1969 under

10 Local branches of foreign incorporated companies owned 29.7%, non-residents owned 26.4% and foreign controlled companies based in Malaysia owned 6.0% of the share capital of limited companies in the Malay Peninsula in 1969. The federal and state governments owned 0.5% of total shares in limited companies. (Re: Jomo Kwame Sundaram, *A Question of Class: Capital, the State and Uneven Development in Malaya*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986, p. 254.)

the leadership of the secular academic-turned-Islamist revolutionary, Nur Misuari. In Afghanistan, public unrest had grown to such an extent that the regime of King Nadir Shah appeared to be tottering on the verge of collapse. (In 1973, Nadir Shah was deposed and a republic was declared.) Elsewhere in the Muslim world, new regimes were desperately trying to reinvent themselves and their societies according to an Islamist mould. In Libya, the regime of Colonel Mu'ammar Gadaffi had deposed the government of Sultan Idris in 1969 and was embarking on the creation of a new Islamist-socialist programme of social reconstruction guided by Gadaffi's infamous *Green Book*. The '*Green Book* Revolution' in Libya, in turn, inspired the revolution in the Sudan led by Colonel Gaafar Muhammad Nimeiri, who had taken over the government in 1969.

Asri was therefore keen to revitalise the Malaysian Islamist Party and turn it into a political force driven by the goal of state capture. But in order to do this, he felt that PAS had to jettison some of the political baggage that it had accumulated in the 1960s. The first thing he did was to sever the link between the Malaysian Islamist Party and its old allies of the Left. The parting of the ways between PAS and the parties of the Socialist Front was made all the easier due to the rise of a new generation of Malay socialist leaders like Kassim Ahmad, who injected the struggle of PRM with the discourse of scientific socialism, something which Asri regarded as anathema to PAS and its Islamist ideology. PAS was now a stand-alone party.

While Asri concerned himself with the task of PAS's internal housecleaning, changes were also taking place in the ranks of its main opponent, UMNO. UMNO at the time was undergoing an internal leadership change as Tunku resigned and opened the way for a new generation of Malay nationalist leaders. While some prominent UMNO leaders were removed from the party and had subsequently spoken out against the leadership of UMNO on PAS's platform,[11] the UMNO ship appeared unsinkable. What was more, the Malaysian state apparatus was made even stronger thanks to the creation of new law enforcement bodies such as the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) in 1971, and the changes made to the constitution in the wake of the 1969 communal crisis. The Constitution (Amendment) Act of 1971 and the Elections (Amendment) Act of 1972 made things even more difficult for PAS by prohibiting the use of religious symbols by political parties.

11 Dr. Mahathir Mohamad was temporarily removed from UMNO after his open confrontation with Tunku in 1969. During a by-election in Kampar, Selangor in 1970, Dr. Mahathir actually spoke against the UMNO leadership on a PAS platform (although he never joined the Islamist party). (Re: Fadzil Noor, 'Mahathir Dihantui Mimpi', speech at Mergong, Kedah, 25 March 1999.)

On 22 September 1970, Tun Abdul Razak bin Dato' Hussein became Malaysia's second prime minister. Earlier, he had served as the country's first deputy prime minister and defence minister (earning him the honorary title of the father of the modern Malaysian armed forces) when he was only 35. Tun Razak's cabinet was dominated by three key personalities: himself, his deputy Tun Dr. Ismail and Home Affairs Minister Ghazali Shafie. The fundamental values and principles upon which UMNO had been built remained intact, and were further sedimented under the leadership of Tun Razak. With the development of the modern Malaysian nation-state there also emerged a new class of Malay élite, namely the new breed of 'statist-capitalists' drawn from the upper echelons of Malay society who were the ones best prepared to reap the benefits of the postcolonial government's development policies.[12] The Malay élite found that not only could their political norms be adapted to new institutional and political circumstances, but by grafting the modern institutional tools of the nation-state onto the traditional culture of Malay feudalism, they could further perpetuate and extend the scope and magnitude of their power.

Keen to demonstrate that he was indeed a defender of Malay interests, Tun Razak initiated a series of policy reforms calculated to address the problem of Malay 'economic weakness' and marginalisation within the country. His main concern was to ensure the unity of the nation, in particular the Malay community. To secure these objectives, the UMNO-led government had formed a number of state agencies such as the *Majlis Amanah Rakyat* (MARA), Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA), Malaysian Rubber Development Corporation (MARDEC) and the *Perbadanan Nasional* (PERNAS) designed to help the underprivileged Malays of the rural interior through a series of state-sponsored agricultural subsidies, private loans and rural development programmes. Like the Federal Agricultural Marketing Authority (FAMA) that had been set up in the 1960s, these state-sponsored marketing bodies eventually developed into state monopolies.[13]

Under the post-1969 leadership of Tun Razak, the nation underwent a process of nation-building and national reconciliation. Within this new national framework, UMNO was to provide the mass base of political support for the government. As Means (1991) has argued, UMNO was 'to be, much

12 Hua Wu Yin, *Class and Communalism in Malaysia*, London: Zeb Books, 1983; Jomo, *A Question of Class*.

13 Jomo K. S. has argued that bodies such as MARDEC, RISDA, FAMA and the LPN were often 'inefficient', and that 'such bureaucratic machinery typically ended up enhancing monopolistic and monopsonistic tendencies because of the financial backing and authorities they received from the State.' (Jomo, *A Question of Class*, pp. 41-42).

more than before, the foundation of the political system while all the other parties in the ruling coalition were to provide peripheral support'.[14] Linked to this was the creation of an 'élite accommodation system' developed to bring about a compromise between UMNO, MCA, MIC and other parties in the ruling coalition. This eventually led to the development of a national ideology encapsulated in the broad-based *rukunegara* (national principles).[15] With the formulation of the *rukunegara* principles, Tun Razak's government began the process of domesticating the political space of the country: In time, a ban was imposed on public discussion of 'sensitive issues' like race, religion and the status of the Malays as the *Bumiputera* (sons of the soil) of Malaysia.

With UMNO taking the lead in its own process of internal reform, Asri Muda felt that the time had come for PAS to make some major structural-institutional changes, too. In 1971, the *Persatuan Islam Se-Malaysia* changed its name to the *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia* (PAS), making it a political party both in name and in its constitution. Its orientation would henceforth be party-political and its parameters of activity confined to the political sphere. Asri and his fellow PAS leaders felt that such changes were necessary, for it was becoming clear that the political landscape of Malaysia was about to get more crowded soon. The 1970s witnessed the rise of a new phenomenon that had no precedent in the country: the angry young men of the universities.

The Fire of Youth: Student Activism and Islamism on the Campuses of Malaysia in the 1970s

Islam, as we have seen earlier, has been a part of life for many Malaysian Muslims for centuries and the vocabulary of Islam permeated almost all areas of the public sphere by then. But the opening years of the 1970s witnessed the emergence of new socio-political movements that were made up and led by different Muslim leaders, who were all contesting the meaning of Islam itself. For an Islamist party like PAS, this posed a threat of an existential nature as it meant that its own discourse was slipping beyond its grasp and control.

14 Gordon P. Means, *Malaysian Politics: The Second Generation*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1991, p. 20.

15 The five main pillars of the *rukunegara* are: (1) belief in God, (2) loyalty to king and country, (3) upholding the constitution, (4) rule of law and (5) good behaviour and morality. Means notes that 'this state of a national ideology was designed to assert that fundamental agreements that had been the result of inter-ethnic bargaining were not to be challenged in the ongoing process of politics' (Means, 1991. p. 13).

It is indicative of the new pattern of social mobility that many of the Islamist movements that emerged in Malaysia in the 1970s were urban-based and made up of young Muslim activists, students and intellectuals who were themselves part of the new urban social class that had been created thanks to the development policies of the 1960s. These groups occupied a broad spectrum of Muslim concerns, ranging from neo-revivalist groups to potentially revolutionary radical movements; this also points to the growing heterogeneity of the Malay-Muslim community by then.

Among the more visible groups that emerged was the neo-revivalist *Darul Arqam* movement that was formed by the self-styled 'Sheikh' Imam Ashaari Muhammad al-Tamimi in 1968. It began as a study group among Muslim scholars, many of whom were university lecturers and academics. In time it evolved into a Sufi-inspired alternative lifestyle movement very much centred around the charismatic personality of its founder. Its activities were based at the *Madinah Al Arqam Saiyyidina Abu Bakar As-Siddiq,* Sungai Penchala near Kuala Lumpur. The movement's aim was to create an alternative model of an ideal Islamic society organised and managed according to the standards and norms set by the Prophet Muhammad himself and his *sahaba* (companions). The movement grew in size until its membership expanded to tens of thousands. In terms of its philosophical and ideological orientation, Darul Arqam was an Islamic revivalist movement whose activities and approach to Islam were very much couched in terms of a discourse of authenticity. Its leaders hoped to bring their followers (and the rest of society, by extension) back to the golden age of Islam by following a literal interpretation of the *Hadith* and *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Its followers dressed and lived according to Ustaz Ashaari's interpretation of the *Sunnah*. The men wore green robes and turbans while the women wore black *hijab* all the time. The movement practised *purdah* and its female members were kept out of public view as much as possible. Ustaz Ashaari also encouraged his followers to take up 'authentic' Islamic practices and pastimes such as riding horses, and archery. The modern lifestyle and practices such as watching television, radio, popular entertainment and other forms of 'hedonistic' culture were frowned upon. The movement set up co-operatives, self-help groups and links with other Islamic movements in the country and beyond. At one stage, Darul Arqam was even accused of being secretly funded by the Saudi government in its effort to eradicate Shia influence in the Malay archipelago.[16]

16 *Tamadun*, August 1999, p. 38.

Another popular Islamist movement that emerged in the 1970s was the *Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia* (Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement, ABIM) which was formed on 6 August 1971 by a number of Malay university student activists from the National Association of Muslim Students led by Razali Nawawi, Anwar Ibrahim and Siddiq Fadhil.[17] (The movement was formally registered on 17 August 1972.) ABIM's first president was Razali Nawawi, who was elected at the movement's first general meeting in Kuala Lumpur. Its secretary general was Anwar Ibrahim.[18] At the beginning, the organisation had only 40 members, but as it developed the movement became centred around the dominant personality of Anwar Ibrahim, who took over as the movement's second president in 1974 (prompting the Malaysian academic Jomo K. Sundaram to refer to ABIM as the 'Anwar Bin Ibrahim Movement').[19]ABIM's leaders were very much influenced by the ideas of Malaysian Islamist scholar Prof. Syed Naquib al-Attas. Chandra (1987) has noted that Anwar's thinking was also shaped by the teachings of Ab'ul Al'aa Maudoodi of Pakistan, the founder of the *Jama'at-e Islami*, Hassan al-Banna of Egypt, the founder-leader of the *Ikhwan'ul Muslimin*, Malek Ben Nabi of Algeria and American Islamist intellectual Ismail Raj Faruqi.[20]

Groups like ABIM posed a challenge to PAS, which was then still seen as a political party whose vote bank was based in the rural Malay hinterland. While ABIM's leaders were university graduates trained in the social sciences and modern modes of organisation and planning, the middle and

17 ABIM was launched at the 10th general assembly of the Muslim Students Association of Malaysia (PKPIM) at Dewan al-Malek Faisal, Petaling Jaya on 3-6 August 1971.

18 Anwar Ibrahim was born on 10 August 1947 in Ceruk Tok' Kun, Bukit Mertajam, Penang. His early education was at Stockwell School, Bukit Mertajam. He then studied at the Malay College of Kuala Kangsar (MCKK) from 1960-66. From 1968-71 he was a student at Universiti Malaya, where he read Malay studies. In 1968, he became the president of the National Association of Muslim Students as well as the Universiti Malaya Muslim Students Association. In 1969, he became the president of Universiti Malaya Malay Language Society. As a student activist he organised and took part in many anti-government demonstrations on issues ranging from Malay rights and privileges to matters of international concern such as the Palestinian issue. Anwar also condemned the policies of Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman on the grounds that Tunku had not done enough to protect and promote Malay-Muslim interests. Anwar held the post of ABIM president until 1982 when he left the movement and joined UMNO. As an UMNO politician, Anwar gained support from his followers in ABIM as well as UMNO members who supported the government's Islamisation programme. Anwar held the posts of junior minister (1982-83), sports and culture minister (1983-85), rural development and agriculture minister (1985-86), education minister (1986-90), finance minister (1990-98) and deputy prime minister (1993-98). By the late 1990s, he was widely regarded as the successor to the prime minister.

19 *Tamadun*, August 1999, p. 38.

20 Chandra, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, p. 54 n. 23.

low-ranking PAS leaders were still drawn from those with more traditional forms of *pondok* and *madrasah* education. Both ABIM and PAS had already begun to promote activities such as *usrah* (study circles), *dakwah* (missionary) programmes and anti-vice campaigns, but ABIM was far better organised and professional in all of these areas than PAS. ABIM's aim was to spearhead the struggle for Islamic reform and revival in the country, and to work towards 'Islamisation from within'. The movement sponsored a number of pondok and madrasah all over the country, such as *Madrasah Sri ABIM* at Kuala Ketil, Kedah and the *Ma'ahad Tarbiyyah Ismamiah* at Pokok Sena. It also established its own private school called Yayasan Anda. Like Darul Arqam, ABIM sought to create an Islamic *society* instead of trying to build an Islamic *state*. ABIM monitored developments in countries like Afghanistan, Palestine and the Philippines, and it eventually established links with other Islamist movements in the neighbouring countries of the region, such as the *Muhamadijah* in Indonesia. In time, it expanded its network to include movements like the *Jama'at-e Islami* of the Indian subcontinent and the *Ikhwan'ul Muslimin* of the Gulf region. ABIM's involvement in international affairs did not stop at mere speeches and propaganda. The movement also took proactive steps in many cases. During the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, ABIM organised a number of mass meetings and demonstrations against the Soviets. As the leader of ABIM, Anwar Ibrahim travelled to Pakistan to deliver RM50,000 worth of aid to the *mujahideen* and collected additional information to put more pressure on the Malaysian government to act.[21] In 1980, ABIM also organised demonstrations against 'fanatical Hindu aggression' in India in response to the rise of the BJP and RSS.[22]

PAS was, by then, faced with a dilemma partly of its own making: By championing the cause of Islam, it had raised religion to the level of a national political concern, and by doing so had politicised it as well. The aim was no longer state capture, but to use the apparatus of the state to Islamise it and society as well. But, thanks to Malaysia's socio-economic development, PAS and UMNO were no longer the only players in the Islamic game: the emergence of groups like Darul Arqam and ABIM meant that the discourse of Islam was now being contested by new actors and agents eager to enter the same discursive-political arena and to define Islam and Islamism as well. Compounding PAS's woes was the apparent success of the UMNO-Alliance developmental model: During the First and Second Malaysia Plans (1960-70 and 1970-75 respectively), the government had

21 Shanti Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, London: Routledge and ISEAS, 1997, p. 79.
22 Ibid. pg. 79.

developed the economy at an amazing rate. GDP growth was 6.5% during the First Malaysia Plan and 7.1% during the Second. Furthermore, under Tun Razak, UMNO was already boasting that in 1970-73 it had managed to facilitate the conversion of 75,000 Malaysian citizens to Islam thanks to its own Islamisation policy.[23] PAS was being outflanked on all fronts, and UMNO leaders felt that the time was right to neutralise the Islamist party by bringing it into the Alliance coalition. Unbeknownst to the Islamist party's members, discussions were conducted among UMNO leaders in December 1972 and soon afterwards Asri was approached by Tun Razak himself. Asri agreed to UMNO's suggestion and, in a move that caught most party members unprepared, Asri announced on 1 January 1973 that PAS would join the ruling UMNO-led Alliance on both federal and state levels.

That PAS would actually join hands with UMNO was something that ought not to have come as a surprise to those who were familiar with Asri Muda himself. At the PAS congress of 1971 he had already stated that:

> We (in PAS) need to adapt ourselves to the rhythm of the times. Although the circumstances of the present are not entirely to our liking, the opportunity remains for us to take advantage of the present circumstances so that we can expand our activities. [24]

But Asri's decision to bring his party into the Alliance was controversial and problematic, to say the least. By taking this important step, Asri was not only breaking away from the policies of the previous generation of PAS leaders; he was also taking a calculated risk intended to strengthen the position and standing of PAS in the long run. PAS's entry into the UMNO-led Alliance was, however, not an unconditional one: Asri had played his part in the bargaining process which revolved around 13 key demands. His chief demand was that PAS should be given the freedom to promote and defend Islamic concerns within the coalition and that the party should be free to reject any government policy that it felt was un-Islamic. Tun Razak and the UMNO leaders agreed to these demands in principle, and a special committee chaired by Tun Dr. Ismail was formed to help facilitate PAS's entry into the coalition.[25]

23 The highest rate of conversions to Islam was in Sabah, then under chief minister Tun Mustapha Harun.

24 Mohammad Asri Muda, 'Uchapan Resmi Konggeres PAS ke XVII, 18th June 1971', Kuala Lumpur: Penchetak Offset Yayasan Anda, 1971, p. 20.

25 The committee, chaired by Tun Dr. Ismail (Deputy Prime Minister and UMNO deputy president) included Asri Muda, Ustaz Yusof Rawa, Abu Bakar Umar, Ustaz Kassim Ahmad and

Soon enough, trouble followed: Many senior PAS members later complained that they were not properly consulted over the decision to join the Alliance when Asri first considered it, and this led to accusations of 'one-man rule' among the party rank and file. Those who rejected the new direction of PAS chose to leave the party or were promptly expelled from it by Asri. Members who left included men such as Amaluddin Darus, who had played a key role in building the party's support base in Kelantan and had served as the head of the party's information and propaganda bureau in Kuala Lumpur. After leaving the party he had helped to build for so long, Amaluddin wrote the book *Kenapa Saya Tinggalkan Pas* (*Why I Chose to Leave PAS*) in which he explicitly set out the reasons for his exit.[26] He attacked Asri Muda's autocratic style of leadership and accused him and the new generation of leaders of betraying the cause of Islam and the Islamist philosophy that had been set by men like Dr. Burhanuddin and Dr. Zulkiflee. After Amaluddin left the party on 15 June 1974, Asri Muda began a purge of Amaluddin's supporters within PAS, which led to more expulsions. Asri sidelined a number of PAS leaders, including Ustaz Abu Bakar Hamzah (ex-secretary general of PAS), Mohamad Fakaruddin Abdullah (head of PAS Youth Wing) and Daud Yatimi. Protests against Asri were not confined to Kelantan. In the other states, many PAS leaders also spoke out against their president. In Perak, those who turned against Asri included Sukurnain Haji Ahmad (deputy head of PAS Perak), Abdul Karim Haji Idris (treasurer, PAS Perak) and Mahmud Zainal Abidin (ex-state assemblyman). In all, the PAS president expelled 15 party leaders from Kelantan, Terengganu, Perlis, Perak and Johor. Some PAS members who were not kicked out of the party chose to leave. One leader, Haji Yusuf Ayub, even went as far as joining the predominantly Malaysian-Chinese DAP as a sign of protest.[27]

Despite the protests against his decision, Asri eventually had his way. When the assembly was finally asked to vote on the issue, the outcome was 190 votes in favour, 94 against, 19 abstentions and 30 absent. Asri regarded this as an endorsement of his decision. Other sections of the party were also invited to show their support for the venture. The move was later approved by the *Dewan Ulama* (Ulama Council) of the party, which was then led by Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat (who was also the executive secretary of PAS in Kelantan).

Dr. Muhammad Dali Muin of PAS.

26 Amaluddin Darus, *Kenapa Saya Tinggalkan PAS*, Kuala Lumpur: Harimau Press, 1977, pp. 35-37. See also: Alias Mohamad, *Sejarah Perjuangan PAS*, Kuala Lumpur: Gateway Publishing House, 1987.

27 Hussein Yaakub, *UMNO Tidak Relevan*, Shah Alam: Angkatan Edaran, 2000, p. 128.

Notwithstanding the vocal objection from several sections of the party's membership, PAS leaders declared that the move was necessary after the trauma caused by the racial riots of May 1969. The Gaullist Asri argued that the experience of 1969 had shown how weak the Malays were in the economic sphere in particular, and called for Malay unity above all else. PAS, he argued, had a role to play in uplifting the economic lot of the Malays as a whole and this could only be done if the party was in a position to hold and exercise real political power. The centralisation of power in the capital and the creation of the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur on 1 February 1974 made it even clearer to all that political power was being concentrated in the metropole. Asri opined that those who remained on the margins would eventually be left out of the race permanently.

For some observers it appeared as if the Islamist party had settled back in its niche as the Islamic affairs bureau of UMNO. A number of important PAS leaders were given posts in the Cabinet. Among them were Asri Muda himself (Land and Special Functions Minister), Abu Bakar Umar (deputy minister) and Yusof Rawa (Malaysian ambassador to Turkey and Iran). Once they were allowed to sit on these important policy-making and steering committees, the PAS leaders were quick to adjust to the new realities of power. The party's third official publication, *Berita PAS* (PAS News), published in Kuala Lumpur, defended the decision of the party leadership and laid the internal disputes to rest. Unlike the previous two official party publications *Suara Islam* and *Bulan Bintang*, *Berita PAS* (written in Roman script) did at least have a Ministry of Home Affairs publication permit. This was a reflection of the extent to which PAS had come to play by the rules by the time of its entry into the ruling alliance in 1973.[28] Compromise and co-operation became the order of the day.

PAS's entry into the ruling coalition also exposed its leaders to a new unanticipated danger: the lure of power itself. In time, PAS's leaders grew accustomed to the perks and privileges of power, and Asri and his network of friends and confidants found themselves cut off from their own traditional followers and supporters. After several years in power, PAS leaders were seen as distant and aloof. Their connection with the ordinary Malays whom they claimed to represent had weakened and their standing in traditional Malay society had declined accordingly. Bachtiar Djamily wrote about the decline of the image of PAS's leaders thus:

28 *Berita PAS*, started in Kuala Lumpur in 1973, was published by the PAS head office, in cyclostyled format, so its distribution was much lower than the two previous official papers, *Suara Islam* and *Bulan Bintang*.

> The difficulty that PAS faced when trying to attract new leaders (and) the decline of the image and standing of PAS leaders in the eyes of the public were also due to these reasons. In the past, PAS's leaders were respected by the people because they were men of faith, men who stood by the customs of the Malays, were not carried away by the current of modernisation, were not taken in by the appeal of a lifestyle contrary to Islam. But after they moved to the capital and they became men of standing, their adherence to the rites and rituals of their faith began to wane. They no longer visited the villages as often as they did before; the clothes they wore were modern and it was too much for the village folk.[29]

In 1974, the Alliance was disbanded and the *Barisan Nasional* (National Front, BN) coalition formed with UMNO at the head of the coalition.[30] The Alliance's symbol of a sailing ship (*kapal layar*) was changed for a set of scales (*dacing*). Asri Muda then declared that PAS would also join BN in its efforts to work together with the government and other political parties for the sake of national unity and harmony. Asri argued that by doing so PAS would be closer to the centre of power and would therefore be in a better position to act as defender and spokesman for Malay-Muslim rights and concerns. Tun Razak also persuaded the Sarawak United People's Party (SUPP), Gerakan and People's Progressive Party (PPP) to join the BN, and he promised the leaders of Gerakan that, come what may, Gerakan would have control of Penang if the BN were to win it in the coming election.

While PAS under Asri Muda was slowly working its way into the corridors of power, the local university student unions were leading the way in the 1974 street protests and demonstrations in Kuala Lumpur and the other major towns of the west coast. Many student leaders had become household names by then. They included Anwar Ibrahim (president of ABIM and MBM), Hishamuddin Rais, Adi Satria, Hamzah Kassim, Yunus Ali and Kamarazaman Yacob (leader of PMUM (Universiti Malaya Students Union)), Abu Zer Ali (head of the Socialist Students Club, Universiti Malaya), Ibrahim Ali (president of KSITM (Mara Institute of Technology Students Union)), Rahman Rukaini (UKM) and Fatimah Sham (USM). Some, like Anwar Ibrahim, Hishamuddin Rais and Kamarazaman Yacob, also enjoyed close ties with local representatives of Arab liberation movements, such as

29 Bachtiar, *Kenapa PAS Boleh Jadi PAS?,* p. 17.

30 The BN coalition was formed after a meeting of all the leaders of the Alliance component parties in Kuala Lumpur on 17 January 1974.

Yusuf Al Hantaz of *Al-Fatah*.[31] They had also formed links with the local Arab embassies, and were particularly close to the representatives of Palestine, Libya and Iraq.

With PAS now embedded in the formal structure of the state apparatus, it was left to the students to take up the mantle of oppositional politics in the country: The student unions organised a number of demonstrations aimed at highlighting injustices on the local and international level. Their protests included one staged in front of the American Embassy in Kuala Lumpur on 16 October 1973 against US support of Israel and another, led by Hishamuddin Rais, at Subang Airport against the visit of Japanese premier Tanaka to Malaysia.[32] The students condemned the role of Japanese companies in Malaysia as a return to the days of Japanese imperialism in Asia. In January 1974, the students of PMUM and PBMUM (Malay Language Society of UM) protested against the government's decision to allow the creation of Tunku Abdul Rahman (TAR) College that had been one of MCA's major demands on UMNO. The Malay students of the local universities were particularly angry over the government's decision to allow a Chinese college to use English as the medium of instruction at a time when efforts were being made to make Malay the medium of instruction in all the other institutions of higher learning in the country. In October 1974, the students took part in the protests at Tasik Utara, Johor, when local Malay residents were forced out of their homes under the orders of the chief minister of Johor, UMNO politician Tan Sri Osman Saat. This cycle of protests and demonstrations culminated in the seizure and occupation of the local university campuses by the student unions in September 1974. Universiti Malaya campus was taken over by PMUM members led by Kamarazaman Yacob, who then formed *Majlis Tertinggi Sementara* (Temporary Supreme Council, MTS).[33]

The activities of the student unions reached a peak in November-December 1974 when the students came out in support of Malay rubber smallholders in Baling, Kedah who demonstrated against the government which, they claimed, had abandoned them after a bad year when the price of rubber had plummeted. The rubber smallholders organised a 'hunger march' – 30,000 rural peasants came out in protest against the state government. The farmers' demonstrations in Baling soon caught the attention of the Islamist student leaders of the local universities. On 3 December 1974,

31 For a comprehensive account of the student revolts of 1972-74 and the key personalities involved, see: Kamarazaman Yacob, *Bersama Anwar ke Penjara*, Petaling Jaya: Transgrafik, 1994.

32 Ibid., pp. 40-41.

33 Ibid., p. 117.

thousands of students protested in the streets of Kuala Lumpur in a show of solidarity with the farmers. While the government tried to play down the role of the radical Islamist student activists in the demonstrations, it was clear that the event was organised by Islamist student leaders who led MBM and Islamist youth movements like ABIM.[34] In response to the demonstrations, the security forces launched *Operasi Mayang* and arrested nearly 1,200 student protesters and detained many student leaders, including Anwar Ibrahim, Adi Satria, Hamzah Kassim, Salamat Ahmad Kamal and Ibrahim Ali under the ISA. Other student leaders such as Hishamuddin Rais and Yunus Ali managed to escape and leave the country with the help of foreign embassy officials.[35] A number of prominent academics were also detained under the ISA for showing their support for the students, including Prof. Syed Husin Ali, Prof. Tengku Shamsul, Dr. K.S. Nijar, Dr. Lim Mah Hui and Sabiha Abdul Samad. On 8 December 1974, units of the Police Field Force (*Polis Hutan*) were allowed to enter and occupy the Universiti Malaya campus. Home Affairs Minister Ghazali Shafie warned that further protests would lead to even more violent reprisals, while Education Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad urged the students to concentrate on their studies. In 1975, the University and University Colleges Act (UCCA) of 1971 was amended to further restrict campus activities.[36]

While all this was happening, PAS was unable to lend its support to the students or the Malay farmers as a result of its own new subject-position as part of the BN establishment. This was particularly galling for Asri Muda, whose own reputation was based on his defence of Malay subaltern interests in the past. Yet sensing that it was now in a better position to capitalise on its political successes, the UMNO-led BN government began to pursue its own Islamisation programme in earnest. In 1974, the federal government excised a new territory under its administration to create its own Federal Religious Council and Office of Islamic Affairs. These came under the Department of Religious Affairs of the Prime Minister's Department. The

34 Shamsul argues that the Malaysian government was not prepared to address the problem of Islamic activism among the student body. 'It would take the Malaysian government another five years to recognise that the protest was motivated by Islamic objectives and to take appropriate counteraction.' (Re: Shamsul, 'Identity Construction, National Formation and Islamic Revivalism', p. 214).

35 The student leaders were offered refuge by representatives of several Arab embassies in Kuala Lumpur. Attempts were made to smuggle them out of the country through Kelantan and Thailand. In the end, Hishamuddin Rais and Yunus Ali managed to escape. Yunus Ali left to join the PLO in Palestine.

36 Chandra Muzaffar, *Freedom in Fetters: An Analysis of the State of Democracy in Malaysia*. Penang: Aliran Press, 1986, p. 11.

Islamic Missionary Foundation was also formed by the federal government to conduct *dakwah* (missionary) work among the Malays and other Muslims. It was clear that during the mid-1970s the Malaysian government was keen to promote its own image as a government that cared deeply and sincerely for Muslim affairs and that it was prepared to direct substantial funds towards promoting and defending Muslim concerns.

With the radical student movement contained and the MCP guerillas kept at bay in the jungles, the BN government headed to the polls yet again in 1974. At the general elections of 24 August 1974, PAS ran as a member of the BN coalition and used the BN's symbol of the *dacing* (scales) instead of its *bulan bintang* (star and crescent). During the campaign PAS suffered from considerable internal sabotage at the hands of its own rank-and-file: many PAS members, angered by Asri's latest political moves, chose not to work for the party during the election campaign. To aggravate the situation further, a number of PAS members formed an opposition front called *Bebas Bersatu* (United Independents) led by the PAS Parliamentarian, Cikgu Ahmad Fakharuddin Abdullah.[37] To the considerable embarrassment of Asri Muda, these dissident PAS members campaigned on their own tickets instead of that of PAS.

With voter turnout registered at 75.1%, the BN coalition won 60.7% of the total votes. The BN won 135 of the 154 parliamentary seats (87.7% of seats). UMNO did particularly well in the election: of the 135 parliamentary seats won by BN, 62 were won by UMNO. The jubilant UMNO leaders, in particular Tun Razak, claimed that BN's success proved that the formula of interethnic élite compromise had worked and delivered the results that many had expected. PAS won 14 parliamentary seats, but the victory laurels went to the coalition as a whole rather than to PAS. Even though it won overall control of Kelantan, PAS could no longer claim that it had the state under its exclusive control as it was now part of a power-sharing arrangement with other parties. The same was the case in Terengganu, where it won half of the parliamentary seats (three out of six) and nine of the 24 state assembly seats contested. (These seats had been allocated to PAS by the BN election committee.) PAS would no longer be in a position to dominate the states that were once under its influence.

In the wake of the elections, PAS's leaders entered into a period of brooding self-reflection and self-criticism. The results of the 1974 election suggested that a large section of the Malay-Muslim constituency in the north opposed PAS's move to join the BN coalition. In Terengganu, 30%

37 Hussein Yaakub, *UMNO Tidak Relevan*, p. 109.

of the total vote was won by the opposition PSRM, led by socialist Kassim Ahmad. Kelantan also registered the same level of anti-BN votes cast for PSRM and independent candidates.[38] The combined vote for the DAP and the Socialist Front parties stood at 18.3%, and although DAP's share of parliamentary seats had dropped from 13 to 9, its share of the vote had increased substantially. It was beginning to be clear that Asri had played his hand too far, and that by bringing PAS into the BN coalition he was in danger of alienating himself from his own party.

In the face of growing resentment and disillusion from his own members, Asri Muda tried his best to focus their attention elsewhere. While in the BN cabinet, Asri spoke at length about the need for the Malaysian government to support fellow Muslims fighting for independence and autonomy in other parts of the world, particularly in Southeast Asia. During his speeches in parliament, Asri highlighted the plight of fellow Malay-Muslims in Patani, Yala, Satun and Narathiwat who had borne the brunt of the Thai government's counter-insurgency campaigns in the southern provinces. Asri also highlighted the struggle of the Moro Muslims in Mindanao in the southern Philippines and publicly expressed his support for the Moro liberation organisations such as MNLF. In 1975, he even called on Malaysian Muslims to volunteer for an international Muslim fighting force to help the Palestinians in their conflict with Israel.[39]

Notwithstanding the obvious fact that he was playing to the gallery and attempting to salvage his reputation as a defender of Islam and Malay interests, Asri's flights of fancy were a cause of concern for the Malaysian government. When Thai students took to the streets of Bangkok in protest against his calls for intervention, the Malaysian prime minister was forced to write personally to the prime minister of Thailand to apologise.[40] Asri's open support for the Moro struggle did not help improve ties with the Philippines, either, and did little to ease the tension between Kuala Lumpur and Manila over the dispute regarding Sabah. However, none of these causes could distract PAS members from the fact that Asri had blunted the thrust of the Islamist party. While they were prepared to follow Asri on his occasional crusades to defend the interests of Muslims elsewhere in the region, many ordinary party members remained dissatisfied with PAS's performance at home.

38 Kessler, *Islam and Malay Politics in a Malay State*, p. 243.

39 Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, p. 63. Asri's call for Malaysian Muslims to join a pan-Muslim fighting force in Palestine was made during the 1975 PAS general assembly.

40 Ibid., p. 86 n. 31.

On 14 January 1976, Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak passed away while on medical leave in London. Tun Razak had been suffering from leukaemia, but the state of his health was not known to the public until the final stages of his illness. Throughout his service, Tun Razak had distinguished himself by his professional conduct and lack of ostentatiousness. After his passing, the leadership of UMNO, the BN coalition and the country as a whole went to Dato' Hussein Onn, son of Dato' Onn Jaafar. Dr. Mahathir Mohamad became deputy prime minister, and Ghazali Shafie home affairs minister.

Hussein Onn was widely regarded as one of UMNO's most respected leaders. As the son of Dato' Onn Jaafar, UMNO's founder, he commanded the admiration and respect of many of its veteran members. He was a Johorean aristocrat by birth, a barrister by training and, during the colonial era, he had served as a commissioned officer in the British Indian Army. By 1976, he was already regarded as an elder statesman. Like his predecessors, Hussein Onn was keen to show that he was fully in command of domestic political affairs. In the same way that Tunku and Tun Razak had flexed their political muscles by demonstrating the hold of Kuala Lumpur on errant leaders and the wayward periphery states and districts, the federal government under Hussein Onn demonstrated its willingness to bridle those disloyal state governments that did not toe the central government's line. In 1977, the chief ministers of Perak, Malacca and Kelantan were quickly expelled from their offices when they proved to be too independent-minded by the central government's standards.

The leaders of PAS, however, had other ideas about Hussein Onn. Asri and his circle of confidants believed that, behind the veneer of respectability, Hussein Onn was a weak leader whose own position in UMNO was precarious. The rise of a new generation of UMNO '*ultras*' such as Mahathir Mohamad and Musa Hitam gave the impression that a palace coup within the conservative party's corridors of power was imminent. There was also much talk about Hussein Onn being regarded as 'too soft' on Communism, and that his cabinet had been infiltrated by 'Communist agents'. (Hussein was eventually forced to take a public stand on the issue; on 1 November 1976, he warned UMNO members that those with leftist leanings should leave the party.)

Just how and why Asri and his close advisors felt that they were in a better position to impose their will on the cabinet during the tenureship of Hussein Onn remains unclear. For whatever could be said about the gentle manners and affable character of Hussein Onn himself, the fact remains that, by the mid-1970s, the Malaysian state apparatus was more centralised and better organised than ever before. The security arm of the

state had grown, and demonstrated its power in the manner that it handled not only the Communist insurgency and *Konfrontasi*, but also the rise of student activism and the new culture of street protests in the early 1970s. If anything, the mid-1970s was a time when the Malaysian government, the civil service and the state security services were at their most robust, and when all this power lay in the hands of the prime minister. Far from being weak, Hussein Onn was perhaps the strongest prime minister who had ever governed Malaysia then, with all the coercive power of a postcolonial leviathan at his disposal.

Notwithstanding the political realities of the time, it was in the mid-1970s that Asri Muda made the fateful error of trying to assert his will in the state of Kelantan. Kelantan, as we have seen earlier, had always been Asri's base, and tolerated no challenges to his supremacy there. This was understandable, considering the pivotal role he played in developing PAS's foothold in the state that was once almost totally cut off from the rest of the country. Over the years, Asri had managed to build up an impressive political party machinery for patronage and support in Kelantan. Thousands of farmers and rural smallholders felt personally indebted to him. However, this culture of neo-feudal patronage and dominance (which, incidentally, was no different from the neo-feudal culture of UMNO) also had its negative side. In time, many sections of Kelantanese society resented Asri for his autocratic style, the clique of personal advisors and confidants he kept around him and the scandals surrounding him and his family. Asri was not able to restrain some of his more ambitious and demanding colleagues and relatives. The manoeuvrings of his followers such as Dato' Ishak Lotfi, Datuk Nik Man Nik Mat, Wan Ismail Wan Ibrahim and his own wife, Datin Sakinah, earned them (and him) the resentment of many PAS members and ordinary people of Kelantan. Asri himself was hardly a tactful politician and he made numerous mistakes that exposed his own underhanded dealings to the public eye – many related to land and timber concessions.[41] In time, the name 'PAS' gained a new meaning while the party was under Asri's control: Asri's opponents began calling it the *'Parti Asri SeKeluarga'* ('Asri and family party').[42]

As minister for land and rural development, Asri had approved the lease of 350,000 acres of land to the Timber Mine Company of Singapore. He also approved the lease of 240,000 acres of land to Rik Seng Timber Company. These leases were eventually terminated by the federal government, much

41 Yahya Ismail, *Bulan Purnama Gerhana di Kelantan*, pp. 52-53.

42 Mohammad Sayuti Omar, *Salam Tok Guru: PAS Perintah Kelantan*, Kuala Lumpur: Tinta Merah, 1999, p. 141.

to the consternation of Asri. As successive scandals and accusations of corruption and nepotism came out in the open, Asri chose to turn a blind eye to them and concentrate on developing his political base in the north. One factor that Asri could not discount, however, was Kuala Lumpur's growing involvement in the affairs of his home state. When it came to the appointment of the chief minister of Kelantan, Asri favoured the local PAS leader Wan Ismail Wan Ibrahim, a close associate and friend. But Hussein Onn and the other BN leaders did not agree to this choice as it was well known that Wan Ismail was a staunch PAS member who held deep misgivings about UMNO. Hussein Onn suggested the post be given to Dato' Haji Mohamad Nasir, as he had previously served as deputy chief minister for two terms and therefore had more experience in the running of state affairs.[43] Mohamad Nasir was also supported by Hasan Adli Arshat, deputy president of PAS.

When Mohamad Nasir was given the post of chief minister of Kelantan, one of his first actions was to stop the deals that Asri and his cohorts had been negotiating in the state over the years. In 1977, Nasir froze the logging and land concessions that Asri had granted. When Nasir threatened to expose some of Asri's underhanded dealings in the state, Asri found that he could no longer trust or work with his own chief minister. To complicate things further, Nasir was supported by a large number of Kelantanese and PAS members, including vice president Hasan Adli. Nasir, Adli and their supporters were seen by Asri as a fifth column that threatened his own position in Kelantan. In the following year, Nasir publicly acknowledged the need for an official inquiry into the financial dealings that had been taking place in Kelantan and he opened the way for the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) to look into the matter. It appeared as if the federal government in Kuala Lumpur had appointed as chief minister to Kelantan a whistler-blower whose aim was to expose the underhand dealings of Asri himself. For Asri this amounted to an act of betrayal, and an attack upon him personally.

Things finally came to a head on 25 September 1977, when the political crisis in Kelantan broke out. In the streets of the state capital Kota Bharu, an estimated 80,000 supporters of Nasir came out in full force, chanting *'Hidup Nasir'* ('Long live Nasir') and calling for the resignation of Asri Muda. Buildings were covered with posters and banners calling for Asri's expulsion from the Islamist party. Asri was publicly denounced as a traitor who had sold out to UMNO and the BN, and had betrayed the cause of

43 Yahya Ismail, *Bulan Purnama Gerhana di Kelantan*, pp. 21-22.

Islam.[44] Responding to these events, the mercurial Asri pressed ahead with his plans to remove Nasir. The Kelantan state assembly was asked to table a vote of no confidence against the chief minister.

Finally, on 15 October 1977, the Kelantan state assembly tabled a vote of no confidence against Mohamad Nasir. While the assembly sat to discuss the issue, pro-Nasir groups protested outside and in the streets of Kota Bharu. Asri was counting on all the BN assemblymen to vote the same way so that Nasir could be removed from his post. This was yet another calculated risk on Asri's part, as he had hoped that the UMNO and MCA assemblymen would vote the same way as the PAS assemblymen to keep the BN united in Kelantan. In the event, 20 PAS assemblymen voted in favour of the proposal, but the other BN assemblymen (13 from UMNO and 1 from MCA) staged a walkout instead. At a most crucial juncture, when Asri had counted upon his fellow BN politicians to support him and help him remove the thorn in his side, they had abandoned him. For Asri, the walkout staged by the UMNO and MCA assemblymen was the ultimate sign of UMNO's perfidy against PAS and he held Hussein Onn personally responsible. *The Star*'s editorial noted that the walkout was 'as near as one could get to tearing up the Barisan Nasional formula in Kelantan'.[45] As a result of this duplicity, the BN's facade of unity was torn to shreds and Asri prepared for an all-out confrontation.

The state of Kelantan, which had been the base of the Islamist party since the 1950s, was now divided between the supporters of Asri and his opponents. As tensions rose and the conflict intensified, rumours began to circulate that the federal government was about to take over Kelantan. On 8 November 1977, the federal government under Prime Minister Hussein Onn intervened directly in Kelantan's internal affairs when it invoked Article 150 of the federal constitution and declared a state of emergency in the state. For most observers of Malaysian politics, the declaration of emergency in Kelantan was seen as an obvious political move on the part of Hussein Onn and the UMNO-led government. When he tabled the 1977 Emergency Act for Kelantan in Parliament, Hussein Onn swore that he was not 'playing politics' in the state. His testimony was laughed at by members of the opposition. But Asri Muda also had egg on his face, for it became clear to the members of his own party that the president of their

44 For a narrative account of developments in Kelantan, in particular Kota Bharu, during this time of crisis, see: Lotfi Ismail, *Detik Mula Konfrontasi Nasir-Asri: 13.9.77-10.10.77*, Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Karangkraf, 1978.

45 *The Star*, 16 October 1977.

party had been outmanoeuvred and was not as invincible as he thought. The state of emergency was maintained for 95 days, and during this time Kelantan was run by the government-appointed minister, Hashim Aman. The declaration of a state of emergency in Kelantan was seen as proof of the extent to which the local affairs of the state were now under the control of the powers-that-be in Kuala Lumpur. Far from helping Asri to maintain his increasingly feeble grip on the state, Kuala Lumpur's intervention in Kelantanese affairs had only made him look more like UMNO's whipping boy in the eyes of his own constituents. From that point onwards, it was Asri Muda's, not Hussein Onn's, days in politics that were numbered.

In a belated bid to cut his losses, Asri Muda declared that PAS would leave the BN coalition on 17 December 1977. The experiment with cohabitation had finally come to an end. At the PAS general assembly on 25 December, Asri accused UMNO divisions in Kelantan of plotting to weaken the party by supporting different factions within it. However, Asri's declaration had come too late; the damage to his reputation and the party was already done. As a result of the split within the party, a significant body of former PAS members under the leadership of the ousted Mohamad Nasir now wanted to settle the score with Asri's PAS. Nasir and his followers formed another Malay-Muslim political party, the *Barisan Jemaah Islamiyyah Se-Malaysia* (BERJASA). BERJASA attracted other PAS members who felt that the time was right to leave the party that Asri had (mis)guided for so long. The leading *ulama* of Kelantan, Ustaz Muhamad Che Wok, left PAS and joined BERJASA. Nasir's party also attracted a number of young Kelantanese Malay-Muslims who were angry and disillusioned with Asri Muda's style of government. One was young student activist Ibrahim Ali, who became head of BERJASA's Youth Wing and was put in charge of the party's election campaign in Kelantan. BERJASA then announced that it would ally itself with UMNO and contest against PAS in the upcoming election.

Though Asri Muda would only be expelled from the Islamist party he helped to build and lead in 1982, his downfall began as early as 1978 when he led his bruised and battered party to the polls of that year. The Kelantan crisis had lent the impression that the Islamist party was then battling for its own survival rather than the Islamist cause that it held in the 1950s and 1960s. PAS by then was so weak and discredited a party that it openly called upon the support of other Malay-Muslim Islamist movements to help it campaign for the election. Among the Islamist movements that responded to PAS's call was the student-led ABIM movement, that was then being led by the charismatic Anwar Ibrahim. If Asri was the voice of the Malay peasantry, Anwar was the voice of Malay youth at the time. Together, it was

hoped that the PAS-ABIM alliance would hand the laurels of victory to the Islamists in Malaysia.

The general Eeections on 8 July 1978 registered a voter turnout of 75.3%. The BN won 57.2% of the votes and 130 seats in Parliament (84.4% of seats). Though the BN's share of the vote had dropped (from 60.7% in 1974 to 57.2%) and it won five fewer seats in Parliament than in the previous election, it could not be said that the losses were entirely due to gains by PAS, for the Islamist party had its own share of problems. Due to the state of emergency, the election in Kelantan was held earlier, on 11 March 1978. PAS, for its part, performed disastrously at the elections. The party's lot was made worse by its internal leadership crisis. Just before the election, a number of PAS *ulama* and *ustaz* from the Nilam Puri Islamic institution accused Asri of abusing Islam for political gain.[46] Because of the declaration of a state of emergency in Kelantan, the party could not effectively mobilise its machinery in time. The party won only 15.5% of the votes and it won only five parliamentary seats (3.2% of seats) in total. In Kelantan, PAS won only two parliamentary seats; one was Pengkalan Chepa, held by Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat. UMNO, on the other hand, was particularly successful in Kelantan: it won five of the 12 parliamentary seats contested. BERJASA won seven Parliamentary seats in the state, which showed just how powerful and popular Asri's rival, Mohamad Nasir, had become. The other three parliamentary seats won by PAS at the 1978 election were all from the northwest coast: two seats in Kedah and one in Penang. These victories were secured by the efforts of other PAS leaders like Ustaz Yusof Rawa, who as we will see later would assume a much more important role within the party.

In the State Assembly the situation was even worse for PAS. During the special state-level election on 11 March, UMNO won 23 of the 36 state assembly seats while BERJASA won 11. PAS won only two seats. With only two parliamentary and two state assembly seats in its hands, PAS totally lost control of Kelantan, which had been its (and Asri's) stronghold since 1959. The loss of Kelantan came as a major psychological blow to the party. For many PAS members who had come to regard Kelantan as the natural home base of the Islamist party, it was as if the knights of the round table had been kicked out of Camelot.

46 A leaflet signed by a group of *ulama* and *ustaz* who were Kelantan Religious Teachers' Association members accused Asri of using and abusing Islamic terms and symbols for political purposes and referred to him as the 'Modern Muhammad' who had led his people astray. The leaflet was signed by Ustaz Lokman Haji Abdul Latiff (then head of the Kelantan Religious Teachers' Association), Ustaz Nordin Omar and Ustaz Abdullah Rawi Ismail.

In the wake of the 1978 electoral defeat, PAS leaders and members attempted a post-mortem to understand and explain how they could have been so badly trounced. Though Asri was adamant that PAS was the victim of UMNO's treachery, and no matter how hard he tried to pin the blame on UMNO and BERJASA, it was clear to many of the members of the Islamist party that the root cause of the party's troubles lay with the party's president himself.[47] Asri had overstepped the bounds of acceptability in his own conduct of affairs in the state, and he had underestimated the degree of resentment that had built up in Kelantan throughout the 1970s. He and the PAS leaders had also misread the political climate within UMNO and falsely assumed that Prime Minister Hussein Onn could be easily manipulated and held at ransom.[48] The truth was just the opposite. UMNO under Hussein Onn was a much stronger party than its opponents thought, and its leadership proved more experienced and capable. In the end, it was UMNO that turned the tables on PAS.

PAS's biggest handicap was its apparent lack of ideological commitment and sense of direction. The party's manifesto for the 1978 election was a hotchpotch of vague promises and grandiose projections for the future, most of which were not substantiated or fully explained to the electorate. Writing shortly after the election, S.H. Alatas (1979) noted:

> The 1978 general election manifesto for the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party was not based on any deep thinking. As Muslims we are naturally attentive of any organisation that uses the name of Islam in its struggle, and we hope that they produce efforts that are broad and all-encompassing, worthy of the name. (But) the sketches of the political programme which have been given to us by PAS show that the thinking within the party remains quite mediocre and of low calibre. In brief, PAS still does not have any clear and ordered programme to deal with major issues, but instead wastes its energy on the most trivial of matters.[49]

Among the issues and concerns raised in the 1978 PAS election manifesto were social problems like vagrancy, the rise in the number of beggars, the need to clean the urban centres and cities, and the need to protect the moral standards

47 Yahya Ismail, *Bulan Purnama Gerhana di Kelantan*, pp. 51-52.

48 Ibid., p. 52.

49 Syed Hussein Alatas, *Kita Bersama Islam: Tumbuh Tiada Berbuah*, Singapore: Pustaka Nasional Press, 1979, p. 159.

of society. Critics like Alatas argued that the party's understanding of the root causes of these social problems was at best superficial and simplistic:

> What is clearly more important is the need to eradicate the causes of these (social problems). The main cause of these social problems is the high level of unemployment in our society, and this problem is far more important than the problem of vagrants in our cities. Does PAS have a programme to deal with the issue of unemployment? No, although it does have a programme to deal with vagrants. … In its manifesto, PAS does not offer any steps to eradicate the problem of unemployment, although in principle it agrees to such a goal in its statement of objectives which reads thus: 'To give special attention to the needs of workers, not only in terms of their social welfare but also to ensure that they receive adequate pay in keeping with the needs of living in society'.[50]

PAS's commitment to an Islamic form of economic management, banking and management of land was likewise vague. The party had no clear-cut solutions to the two major problems affecting the country's economy at the time: inflation and structural unemployment.[51] The 1978 PAS manifesto called for land reform, but failed to explain what shape this reform would take. The same was true for its calls for reform in the business and banking sectors. Apart from the oft-repeated claim that it would put an end to the practice of *riba* (interest) in the banking sector, the party leadership failed to provide an alternative system. Most important of all, the party failed to explain just how their reforms would make the economy, banking system and management of the agricultural sector more *Islamic*.[52]

As the year 1978 came to a close, it was evident to all observers that PAS was in a state of profound ideological crisis. PAS under Asri Muda no longer seemed to offer a credible Islamist alternative to the brand of conservative nationalism projected by UMNO. Some, like the radical Islamist activist Khalid Samad, even considered the prospect of forming an Islamic party of their own to take up the struggle that PAS had failed to defend.[53] In the

50 Ibid., p. 160.

51 Samuel Bassey Okposin and Cheng Ming Yu, *Economic Crises in Malaysia: Causes, Implications and Policy Prescriptions*, Kuala Lumpur: Pelanduk Press, 2000, p. 83.

52 Alatas, *Kita Bersama Islam*, pp. 162-163.

53 Malay-Muslim student activist Khalid Samad returned from higher studies in Europe in the late 1970s, but was disappointed with PAS's performance under Asri Muda. Khalid considered launching a new Islamic party called *Parti Negara Islam* (Islamic State Party, PNI), but this did

wake of the election, the ulama of PAS began to take over the running and management of the party.[54] Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat took over the administration of PAS in Kelantan and began a process of internal party reforms directed towards improving the organisational structure and expanding its scope of activities and influence. One of the first things he did was to increase the number of evening lectures (*kuliah malam*) and Friday lectures (*kuliah Jumaat*) that had been a regular feature in the local mosques and madrasahs. Nik Aziz identified 35 locations for regular *kuliah*, and ensured that the speeches were directed towards themes relevant to party-political concerns.[55] In Terengganu, the leader of *Dewan Pemuda* PAS and contender in the 1978 election, Tuan Guru Abdul Hadi Awang, also began to play a more visible role in directing the party at the local level.[56] The slow process of rebuilding the Islamist image of PAS by the ulama had begun. As Yahya Ismail describes it:

> It was upon these shattered remnants that PAS was to rebuild itself and to gather together its scattered forces. The party had lost control of a state, but it did not lose its political objectives which were based on Islam.[57]

Asri Muda, on the other hand, began to realise that he was about to be out of a job.

The Islamist Tide Grows Stronger: PAS in the Muslim World at the Close of the 1970s

Thanks to the antics and ambitions of Asri Muda, Malaysia's Islamist party had grown into a parochial, inward-looking movement that was moved mainly by local concerns. By the late 1970s, PAS had slipped off the global

not materialise as the registrar of societies refused to issue a permit. Khalid only joined PAS in 1982, when the *ulama* faction took control. He later became head of PAS Selangor division, secretary of Dewan Pemuda and member of the Jawatankuasa Agong.

54 Jamal Mohd Lokman, *Biografi Tuan Guru Dato' Haji Nik Abdul Aziz*, 1999. p. 83.

55 Nik Aziz Nik Mat, *Kelantan: Universiti Politik Terbuka*, Nilam Puri: Ma'ahad ad-Dakwah wal-Imamah, 1995, p. 237 n. 19.

56 From 1976-79 Tuan Guru Abdul Hadi Awang was the leader of Terengganu Dewan Pemuda PAS. He contested for both the parliamentary seat of Marang and the state assembly seat of Manir in the 1978 election, but lost both contests.

57 Yahya, *Bulan Purnama Gerhana di Kelantan*, p. 96.

map of political Islam while many more developments were taking place elsewhere, such as the Lebanese Civil War of 1975-76, Israel's attack on Lebanon (in 1978), the attacks on the *Ikhwan* in Syria (in 1979), the storming of the *Ka'aba* in Mecca (in 1979), the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (in December 1979) and the Iranian revolution. Even the Communist Japanese Red Army had grown bolder, as they demonstrated in August 1975 when they hijacked a Japan Airlines jetliner and landed at Kuala Lumpur's Subang airport en route to Libya. While almost all the countries of the Muslim world were witnessing the rise of political Islam – by then tinted in a more radical hue – Malaysia's Islamist politics had dwindled down to the level of petty personal politics, accusations of corruption and bickering over land titles. Such provincialism was about to come to an end in no uncertain terms, and soon.

While the crestfallen Asri was left to mope and lick his wounds, the ulama of PAS were coming to the fore to take up the responsibility of leadership in the party. Since the 1950s the members of the *Dewan Ulama* of PAS had been content with the role of serving as the Islamist party's religious and doctrinal advisors, but this was about to change for good. By 1979 PAS ulama such as Ustaz Haji Yusof Rawa, Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat, Tuan Guru Abdul Hadi Awang and Ustaz Baharuddin Abdul Latif were growing increasingly confrontational towards UMNO and vocal in their support for Islamist movements abroad (following the Islamic revolution in Iran). The PAS ulama also attacked the UMNO-led government by accusing it of working hand-in-glove with the enemies of Islam. PAS leaders began to condemn the state-controlled media, which they accused of fanning the fear of Islamisation in the country. In a speech at the Dewan Masjid Melayu in Taiping in November 1979, Ustaz Baharuddin condemned what he saw as the Islamophobic tendency within UMNO and in the national media:

> On the mainstream media which despises Islam and the Islamic struggle, this is not only evident in their coverage of news, the comments and the editorials which are prejudiced against Islam and the Islamic struggle or the goal of implementing Islamic laws in the country, but it is also seen in the way that they have allowed themselves to be the willing agents of the enemies of Islam, the agents of Zionism, Christians, Capitalists as well as Communists … We can hardly believe that such anti-Islamic prejudice can come from a newspaper whose shareholders, editors and producers, and readers for that matter, are themselves Muslims. (An oblique reference to the *Utusan Melayu*, *Berita Harian* and *New Straits Times*) … Whatever may be the prejudice

> that is directed against Islam and the Islamic struggle, we (PAS) will always support any Islamic movement, be it in Iran or in another other part of the world where Muslims are struggling to build their cherished hopes and dreams for truth, justice and an Islamic way of life. *The enemies of the Islamic struggle are our enemies as well.* (Emphasis mine)[58]

PAS ulama accused the UMNO leaders of pandering to foreign anti-Muslim interests (the most important of which was the Zionist lobby) and local fears voiced by non-Muslim communities wary of the prospect of further Islamisation. Speaking on the issue, Ustaz Baharuddin accused UMNO leaders and the government of harbouring Islamophobic tendencies and being traitors to their own religion who only wanted to hold onto their political power:

> It seems that the disease of Islamophobia which has infected the leaders of the National Front, and UMNO in particular, is quickly turning itself into a hatred of Islam itself. How and why so-called Islamic leaders could be fearful of Islam is something which one cannot understand. The only explanation that one can offer, and this might be a correct explanation, is that the root of their fear of Islam and the Islamic struggle as manifested by PAS lies in their fear of having their monopoly of power challenged and taken away from them.[59]

In retaliation, the UMNO-led government renewed its attacks on PAS and initiated an extensive media and propaganda campaign to besmirch the image of the Islamist party as an organisation made up of religious extremists. While UMNO returned to its Malay-centric agenda of promoting the economic and political concerns of the Malays, PAS was accused of being a fundamentalist party exploiting religion for the sake of furthering sectarian ends. Several attempts were made to link PAS with other militant Islamist movements both at home and abroad. One such incident occurred in the wake of the Alor Star farmers' riots in 1980, when PAS was accused of having links to a radical militant group called the *Pertubuhan Angkatan Sabillullah*.[60] The UMNO-owned and state-run media then claimed that

58 Baharuddin, *Islam Memanggil*, pp. 180-181.

59 Baharuddin, *Islam Memanggil*, p. 184.

60 James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, Kuala Lumpur: Yale University Press and Universiti Malaya, 1985, p. 276. Little is known about *Pertubuhan*

'subversive Islamist elements' were planning to launch a campaign of violence and terror in the state. During the round-up of Islamist activists and leaders, PAS ulama Ustaz Othman Marzuki was arrested and accused of masterminding the *Pertubuhan Angkatan Sabillullah*.[61]

The fear of Islamist militancy taking root in Malaysia grew even more the following year when a number of Muslim extremists took the law into their own hands in October 1980. During the incident, a group of 20 Muslim extremists dressed in white robes and armed with swords attacked a police station at Batu Pahat, Johor. During the attack, 23 police staff were killed or injured. Writing in *The Star*, the retired UMNO leader Tunku Abdul Rahman claimed that the group was inspired by 'Wahhabis' and had taken their cue from the militants who had attacked and occupied *Masjid'ul Haram* in Mecca in 1979.[62] Others claimed that the group was inspired by Shia revolutionaries following the Iranian revolution of 1979. While the situation in Malaysia seemed to deteriorate, developments in other parts of the Muslim world were hardly any better. Finally, on 6 October 1981, the Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat was killed by members of the Islamic militant group *Jama'at al-Jihad*. Khalid Islambuli, the assassin who fired the fatal burst, cried out: *'I have killed the Pharaoh and I do not fear death.'* His movement called for the extermination of all Muslim leaders deemed hypocrites (*munafikin*). It was in the midst of this growing tension and insecurity in the Muslim world that Malaysia experienced its fourth transition of power.

On 17 July 1981, Prime Minister Hussein Onn announced that he would retire after a heart bypass operation in London. Shortly before he stepped down, Hussein Onn launched the *Amanah Saham Nasional* (ASN) share-ownership scheme (on 20 April 1981) that was promoted as yet another effort by UMNO to improve the economic lot of the Malay-Muslims. Hussein Onn was replaced as prime minister of Malaysia and President of UMNO by the one-time '*ultra*' of UMNO, Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, who came to power in the same year as Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

The ascendancy of Mahathir Mohamad coincided with the decline of Asri Muda. In many respects this development was indicative of the socio-political changes that were taking place in the country, as Malay-

Angkatan Sabillullah, which was said to be a loosely organised militia numbering anything from a few dozen to a few hundred men. Though a number of PAS leaders and members were arrested and questioned, no major discovery of arms or training camps was ever made.

61 C.N. al-Afghani, *Operasi Kenari: Suatu Hukuman Tanpa Bicara*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Pemuda Press, 1990, p. 125.

62 Tunku Abdul Rahman, 'The Fanatics of Batu Pahat', *The Star*, 20 October 1980.

sian society was evolving as a result of a host of external variable factors that were not entirely unique to the country. Malaysia was on the verge of economic take-off, and its capital-driven developmental model was acclaimed and supported by a considerable number of Malaysians who themselves were about to experience the benefits of new-found upward social mobility. It was thus hardly a surprise that Dr. Mahathir came to power with the support of a large section of the Malay-Muslim community, in particular the Bumiputera statist-capitalist class.[63] These were the urban-based Malay-Muslims who had benefited from the New Economic Policy (NEP) era and whose economic lot had greatly improved since the early 1970s. As a result of the policies introduced by Tun Razak and Hussein Onn, the Bumiputeras' share of the Malaysian economy had risen from a measly 1.5% in 1969 to 12.5%. (Though it should be noted that the government did not manage to reach the NEP's stated target of increasing the Malay share of the economy to 30%.) For the first time in Malaysian history, an UMNO leader had assumed control of the country with the backing of UMNO Youth and also Malay-Muslim student unions all over the country.[64] As soon as he came to power, Mahathir released all the politicians and student leaders who were detained under the orders of the previous administration.[65]

Dr. Mahathir was a very different kind of UMNO leader and, in some respects, he was the sort of Malay-Muslim nationalist that PAS was unable to counter; if the earlier UMNO leaders could be dismissed as aristocrats and royals who were out of touch with the popular sentiments of Malaysians, Mahathir was quite the opposite: he had risked his own career by condemning the traditional feudal culture of the Malays as antiquated, decadent and corrupt. In his book, *The Malay Dilemma* (1970), he had set out his vision to radically reinvent the Malay community and to bring into being a new generation of Malay-Muslim élite who were economically dynamic, competitive, outward-looking, cognisant of the demands

63 Jomo K.S. has identified these Malay statist-capitalists as mainly 'Malay politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen' who had benefited greatly from the NEP era (Jomo, *A Question of Class*, pp. 268-269).

64 Kamarazaman Yacob notes that Dr. Mahathir and Musa Hitam, who were regarded as the 'ultras' of UMNO, received the sympathy and support of many local university student unions and student leaders when they were expelled from UMNO in 1970 (Re: Kamarazaman, *Bersama Anwar ke Penjara*, p. 108).

65 Chandra (*Freedom in Fetters*, p. 331) notes that during the first few years of Dr. Mahathir's administration, the number of political detainees in the country dropped from 1,200 in 1980 to fewer than 100 in 1985. By September 1987, the number of detainees had dropped to 27, the lowest in the country's history since the ISA was introduced in 1960.

and needs of modernity, knowledgeable in Islam and yet also beholden to the state. Mahathir's understanding of Islam was also different from that of the traditional ulama and radical Islamists. A believer in modernist-developmentalist Islam, he had shown that he was unwilling to tolerate both revolutionary Islamist politics and traditional obscurantist Islam. In 1979, while serving as deputy prime minister under Hussein Onn, he had already warned the Islamist groupings in the country of the danger of emulating the style of the Iranian revolutionaries.[66] This was a clear warning to Islamist groupings like ABIM who were openly sympathetic to the Iranian revolution.

The prime minister's strong aversion to outdated traditional Islamic practices was also well known. Like the previous generation of *Kaum Muda* reformers, Dr. Mahathir regarded the 'folk Islam' and popular practices of the Malay-Muslims as fundamentally tainted by antiquated, deviationist and even un-Islamic elements. While the ulama laid stress on the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* of the Prophet and lamented that the younger Malays could no longer read and write in *Jawi* (Arabic script), Dr. Mahathir lamented that the Malays were poor in the fields of business, scientific research and heavy industries. To prove that Islam was compatible with modernity and development, Dr. Mahathir spent his life trying to develop his own school of Islamic modernist thought.

As a result of Mahathir's promotion of his own development-oriented school of Islamic thought, Islam became a more contested signifier in the domain of Malaysian public discourse. PAS defended its stand on the Islamic state, but UMNO (under Mahathir) was now offering a different view of what an Islamic society could look like: One that was developed, modern, rational and authentic on its own terms. This had a profound effect on PAS's fortunes, as it meant that two of Malaysia's biggest Malay-Muslim parties were now offering two very different alternative paths to the Islamic utopia that had become the goal and ambition of a new generation of Malay-Muslim youth in the country. The fact that Mahathir received the support of the Muslim student movements was already worrisome (for PAS), but soon after the biggest blow was struck when the Mahathir administration managed to court the rising star of Malay-Muslim student activism in the land: Anwar Ibrahim.

In March 1982, Anwar Ibrahim shocked the members of his own ABIM movement by announcing that he was standing as an UMNO candidate in the upcoming election. On 29 March, during a press conference at the Prime

66 This was reported in the *New Straits Times*, 7 July 1979 and *The Star*, 19 July 1979.

Minister's office in Kuala Lumpur, he read out a declaration in which he stated: 'I have chosen to join UMNO because it affords me the opportunity to continue with my struggle, and I hereby pledge my total support for the Prime Minister and the party that he leads'.[67]

Anwar's decision to join UMNO was greeted with shock and disbelief among the Islamists of the country: ABIM was then widely regarded as one of the most vocal critics of the government and Anwar Ibrahim himself had openly attacked the government's 'Look East' policy on the grounds that countries like Japan and South Korea were secular capitalist states that should not serve as models for a Muslim country like Malaysia.[68] ABIM even came to the rescue of PAS during the 1978 election campaign, and it was ABIM that lent itself to Asri Muda's PAS in an effort to give the party more Islamic credentials during its time of crisis. In 1979, Anwar was praised by Ayatollah Khomeini and awarded the Maulana Iqbal Centenary award by none other than General Zia 'ul Haq of Pakistan, and he was thought to be a potential candidate for the leadership of PAS.[69]

Anwar's critics accused him of treason, and claimed that he had come under the influence of the American-based Islamist thinker Ismail Raj Faruqi, who was impressed by Dr. Mahathir's commitment towards the cause of Islamisation in the country. Anwar's close friends and confidants like Ustaz Ahmad Awang warned him that he was more likely to end up sharing the fate of other Islamists who had been swallowed up by UMNO, such as Osman Abdullah and Sanusi Junid. Ustaz Ahmad's warning to Anwar came in the form of a letter listing ten 'dangers' that he had to avoid at all cost. These included not working too closely with the *kafir* of the non-Muslim BN parties, not indulging in the immoral and decadent lifestyle of the secular UMNO élite and avoiding contact with women as much as possible.[70]

67 Quoted in al-Afghani, *Rakyat Makin Mantang*, p. 19.

68 Chandra, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, p. 22.

69 In his book *Anwar Dizalimi?*, Mohammad Sayuti Omar claims that Asri Muda had even brought up the matter of Anwar Ibrahim being invited to take over the leadership of PAS with the other leaders of the party. (Re: Mohammad Sayuti Omar, *Anwar Dizalimi: Siapa TPM Baru?*, Kuala Lumpur: Tinta Merah, 1998, pp. 49-50.)

70 In his interview with *Tamadun* magazine, Ustaz Ahmad Awang described the contents of the letter he gave to Anwar before the latter joined UMNO. In the letter, the *ustaz* warned Anwar never to be too close to the *kafirs* of the other non-Malay and non-Muslim parties. He advised him to work with them, but forever keep his distance (p. 8). He also warned Anwar never to get involved with women, or to take on the ostentatious and lavish lifestyle of the UMNO élite. Ustaz Ahmad noted that two years after the letter was given, he was asked by one of his followers whether Anwar had kept to the ten warnings given to him. Ustaz Ahmad replied that Anwar had only kept to one

Anwar's sudden resignation from the post of ABIM president caused a major split within the Islamist movement. Siddiq Fadhil became ABIM's next president, but even he could not halt the further haemorrhaging from within the movement as more and more members left to enter politics. Under Siddiq Fadhil's leadership ABIM began to steer itself towards a middle path and during the UMNO-PAS conflicts of the 1980s the soft-spoken and moderate Siddiq was instrumental in developing ABIM to become a peacemaker and negotiator between the two sides. Some ABIM leaders followed Anwar and joined UMNO, promising to further the cause of Islamisation from within the ranks of the conservative-nationalist party. Other ABIM leaders, including Ustaz Fadzil Noor, Ustaz Abdul Hadi Awang, Ustaz Nakhaie Ahmad, Mohamad Sabu and Syed Ibrahim Syed Abdul Rahman, chose to leave the movement and become more active in PAS. Mohamad Sabu went one step further and denounced Anwar in public by calling him a *munafik* (hypocrite) and a traitor to Islam and the Islamist cause. Abdul Hadi Awang was then seen as PAS's answer to Anwar and in the same year he was elected as the *pesuruhjaya PAS* (party secretary) in Terengganu.

Still reeling from the shock, Asri cobbled together whatever resources were at hand and led PAS to the next general elections that were held on 22 April 1982. The voter turnout was 74.4%, and for the third time in a row, the BN coalition had a new leader. After the votes were cast it was clear that the UMNO-led BN coalition had increased its share of the vote to 60.5% (from 57.2% in 1978). The BN gained a total of 132 seats in Parliament (85.7% of seats). Among the BN component parties, UMNO did even better than it expected because of the entry of Anwar Ibrahim and the Islamists of ABIM. Anwar won the constituency of Permatang Pauh in Penang and was soon promoted to the rank of junior minister in the Prime Minister's department. He was later promoted to the post of culture, youth and sports minister. The entry of BERJASA and Gerakan into the BN coalition also meant that BN had little to fear in Kelantan and Penang.

PAS, on the other hand, did not fare so well: the party won only 14.5% of the vote, a decline from 15.5% in the previous election. The party won five parliamentary seats (3.2% of seats) as it had in the 1978 election, but its performance in the state assembly election registered a resurgence of sorts. In Kelantan, PAS won 4 parliamentary seats and 10 state assembly seats – a marked improvement from the rout it suffered in 1978. In Terengganu, PAS won 5 of the 28 seats in

of them (p. 8). Ustaz Ahmad noted that after Anwar had joined UMNO they were no longer close. Anwar's lifestyle began to change as he adjusted to the new political environment of UMNO: he began to dress in Western suits and enjoyed luxurious comforts (*Tamadun*, November 1998).

the state assembly; but in Kedah, the party won only one parliamentary seat (Bukit Raya) and two state assembly seats. Despite its gains in the north, PAS's share of the vote dropped on the west coast and in the south. The party did particularly badly in Johor. It only fielded 6 candidates for parliament and 10 for the state assembly, and its share of the vote dropped to 18,234 (for parliamentary seats) and 11,232 (for state assembly seats). The DAP and Socialist Front won 19.6% of the votes and the DAP won 9 parliamentary seats (5.8% of seats), a drop from 16 at the 1978 election. Five of the seats won by DAP were in the Peninsula; the other four were in East Malaysia. (At the time, PAS's activities were still confined mainly to the Peninsula.) Although the Malay-dominated PRM failed to win a single parliamentary seat, it must be noted that, once again, the parties of the left earned more votes and seats than PAS.

Another observation that can be made at this point is that, by 1982, the leadership of PAS was slowly but surely shifting to the more conservative ulama faction within the party. If UMNO was gaining the support of the youth, PAS was regaining the support of the conservatives: at the 1982 elections, many PAS candidates who won (or retained) their seats were aligned to the ulama. This was clearly the case in Terengganu, where all five PAS state assemblymen were prominent ulama who enjoyed a considerable following in the state. Leading the pack was Tuan Guru Abdul Hadi Awang, who became a party vice-president in 1989.[71] In Kedah, PAS's old guard led by men like Datuk Abu Bakar Umar and Datuk Sudin Wahab was also defeated by new guard ulama such as Ustaz Fadzil Noor and Ustaz Nakhaie Ahmad.

This suggested that the two Malay-Muslim parties – UMNO and PAS – were becoming vehicles for socio-political mobility for different sections of the Malay-Muslim community. UMNO under Mahathir was seen by some as the new nationalist party that would be able to uplift the condition of a new generation of higher-educated and newly urbanised Malay-Muslim youth, who harboured middle-class ambitions and were hoping to enter the state apparatus and the economy in order to commandeer the Malaysian state. PAS, on the other hand, was seen by the more conservative Malay-Muslims as their vehicle for socio-political advancement, and the means through which the more conservatively inclined Islamists could eventually succeed in state capture and transforming Malaysia as a result. Political parties – themselves a rather novel innovation that had no precedent in Malaysia in the 19th century

71 The other four PAS state assemblymen were Ustaz Harun Taib, Ustaz Abu Bakar Chik, Haji Wan Abdul Mutalib Embong and Haji Mustafa Ali. Abdul Hadi Awang described the five as the 'five fingers' which formed the 'fist' of PAS that would break down the hegemonic hold of UMNO in Terengganu (Zulkifli, *Operasi Tawan Trengganu*, p. 36).

– were now instituted and accepted as a legitimate means of securing mobility, respectability and success. But Asri Muda, whose brand of nationalism was not ethno-nationalist enough for the Malay nationalists, and whose commitment to Islamism was not conservative enough for the ulama, was left in the lurch.

In the wake of the 1982 elections, the curtain was being lowered to mark the end of Asri Muda's career. PAS's new generation of conservative leaders were no longer able or willing to tolerate the idiosyncracies of the man who had led their party to the brink of ruin. Through the brief period of 'cohabitation' with UMNO and the BN alliance, PAS under Asri Muda had managed to break into the charmed circle of mainstream national politics, but at a terrible cost to its reputation, credibility and its membership. As a result of this brief flirtation with power, PAS lost some of its leaders to UMNO and the government. Others became thoroughly disillusioned and disappointed with the direction that the party leaders had taken, and consequently left the party to form alternative movements and parties of their own.

During the time of Asri Muda PAS developed a reputation for being a Malaycentric party that catered solely to the interests and concerns of the Malay-Muslim constituency. The narrow ethno-nationalism of Asri Muda was in many respects different, if not antithetical, to that of the party's previous leader Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy. Asri's strong stand on Malay issues and concerns stemmed from his own past as a Malay ethnonationalist, and Asri's profile as a Malay leader has been summed up by Chandra Muzaffar thus:

> In fact, of all the leaders that PAS has had in its long and chequered history, it is perhaps Asri who was the most ardent advocate of the Malay position, or Malay 'nationalism' in the political parlance of the day.[72]

The strong ethno-nationalist stance that he adopted did, however, incur a cost upon Asri and his party. Henceforth in the eyes of many non-Malay and non-Muslim Malaysians, PAS would be associated with a brand of Malay ethno-nationalism that was exclusive, even supremacist, that was anchored on essentialist categories of blood and belonging. It must be remembered that Asri was first and foremost a Malay nationalist and activist whose natural constituency was the Malay people. Asri had always regarded the Malaysian-Chinese and other minority communities as 'foreigners' and 'outsiders' who never really belonged to *his* country. This was partly because he had entered the world of Malay politics at a time when the non-Malay minorities in the country were not yet full-fledged citizens. Like many other

72 Chandra, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, p. 56.

Malay-centric ethno-nationalists of his generation, Asri found it difficult to adjust to new circumstances where the non-Malays had to be accepted as citizens with the same political, economic and cultural rights as the Malays. From his own ethnocentric perspective, Asri could only view the non-Malay communities with a combination of apprehension and fear. In 1953, he was one of the PAS leaders who spoke out against the Alliance's proposal to extend citizenship rights to the non-Malays. PAS's failure to block this measure led to more than a million Chinese being given Malayan citizenship in 1957, the first year of Malaya's independence. From then on, Asri waged an incessant battle to halt what he saw as the erosion of Malay rights and the marginalisation of the Malay community within their own country.

The 1960s and 1970s were a time when the sensitivities of both the Malays and non-Malays were being severely tested by different, at times conflicting, claims for cultural autonomy or assimilation. At the heart of the conflict was the crucial question of what Malaysian identity should be based on. At stake were the status of the Malay and non-Malay languages and cultural practices held dear by all the communities concerned. The stand-off between the Malay and non-Malay cultural groups continued all the way up to the late 1970s, and the 'national dress' controversy of 1978 showed that neither side was willing to come to any sort of workable compromise.[73] Set against this wider background of shifting subject-positions and new socio-political identities and loyalties, Asri Muda's narrow ethnocentrism was typical of the time. His engagement with the discourse of Malay rights and cultural supremacy reflected the concern of the Malay political élite in the 1970s, but it did little to improve the general understanding of Islam as a universal religion with a message directed to humanity as a whole. As Chandra (1979) has noted:

73 The *songkok* or 'national dress' controversy of 1978 revolved around the question of what should constitute Malaysian national dress. Since independence in 1957, the Malaysian government had been trying to develop a mainstream national culture that could unite all the major ethnic and cultural groups in the country. Due to the sensitivity of the matter, the project of nation-building never really developed in tandem with the other major government programmes. In 1978, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) administration decided that all students graduating that year must wear national dress at the graduation ceremony. This included the black Malay felt or velvet cap (*songkok*), the traditional Malay shirt (*baju Melayu*) and the Malay waist-cloth (*songket*) under their robes. Non-Malay students immediately protested against the move, claiming that it would rob them of their own ethnic identity. The non-Malay opposition parties came to the support of the non-Malay students, claiming that the policy would lead to cultural assimilation by force. In the end, a compromise was reached: non-Malays were allowed to wear Western-style suits, but they still had to wear the *songkok*. This option was also rejected by the non-Malay students; 85% of them refused to participate in the graduation ceremony.

> (PAS) has all along demanded the 'restoration of Malay sovereignty' primarily because of the indigenous status of that community. What is important is that its demand had been presented in the name of Islam. Even a cursory analysis of PAS's philosophy (in the 1970s) will reveal that its insistence upon Malay political pre-eminence, Malay economic pre-eminence and Malay cultural pre-eminence have been articulated as a way of protecting the integrity of Islam … The willingness to live with *Bumiputeraism,* and worse still, to defend it at times, shows that the real spirit of Islam has not crystallised.[74]

Chandra and others have thus noted that, by the end of Asri's period of leadership of PAS, the Islamist party's understanding of Islamism had grown increasingly communitarian. PAS still defended its universalist Islamist claims and demands, but the discursive frontier of PAS's Islamism coincided with the ethnic-racial frontier of the Malay community. (It was hardly a surprise, then, that throughout Asri's period of leadership PAS had hardly managed to attract any non-Malay Muslims to the party's cause.) This may have had an appeal for some conservative nationalists in the country, but by the early 1980s Malaysian society in general and Malay-Muslim society in particular had grown more diverse. For the younger generation of Malay-Muslim students, activists and professionals who had been educated in the universities of Malaysia and abroad, such a shallow communitarian bias was too narrow a lens through which to view the wider world. While Islamist movements worldwide were engaged in revolutions, Asri's PAS was more concerned about the fate of Malay customs, language and sartorial norms. In the end, it was the stronger tide of capital-driven globalisation and Islamist revolutionary politics that won.

23 October 1982 was the day at Mohammad Asri Muda met his inglorious end. At the 28th PAS General Assembly that was held at the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in Kuala Lumpur, he stood before his fellow party members – many of whom were now supportive of the 'ulama faction' led by prominent PAS ulama such as Ustaz Yusof Rawa (who became deputy president of PAS in 1981) and Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat as well as ex-ABIM leaders including Ustaz Fadzil Noor, Ustaz Abdul Hadi Awang, Ustaz Nakhaie Ahmad and Syed Ibrahim Syed Abdul Rahman. His feeble attempt to defeat the faction had failed and in the end it was Asri who was forced to announce his own resignation, which was met by cheers among the audience. The ulama were

74 Chandra Muzaffar, *The Universalism of Islam*, Penang: Aliran, 1979. Quoted in Charles Kurzman, *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 156-160.

now in power in PAS, though few among them were in a forgiving mood.[75] Asri took with him a number of prominent PAS leaders, including Datuk Abu Bakar Umar, Haji Hassan Mohamad, Haji Wan Ismail Wan Ibrahim, Haji Wahab Yunus, Haji Ahmad Shukri, Harun Jusuh, Haji Ramli Abdullah and Haji Ahmad Long. Others close to Asri but who refused to leave the party (like Datuk Haji Nik Man Nik Mat) were expelled.[76] A handful of other Asri supporters (including Abdul Halim Abdul Rahman, Wan Abdul Rahim Abdullah and Abdul Fatah Haji Harun) managed to escape the purge and remained in the party.[77]

Immediately after the Assembly, Asri openly attacked the new party leaders in the press, which was a cause of embarrassment for the party. Subsequently Asri's membership was suspended by the party's disciplinary committee on 30 January 1983.[78] On 24 February, he was expelled from the party. Ustaz Haji Yusof Rawa, who took over as the fifth president of PAS on 1 May 1983, spoke of Asri thus: 'Those who try to use the Islamic party as a front or mask for other purposes will surely be destroyed in the end by the members of PAS who have proven their dedication to the true struggle of Islam.'[79]

Asri Muda then tried to revive his political fortunes by forming another party of his own, the *Hizbul Muslimin Malaysia* (HAMIM), named after the

75 In an interview with the author in 1999, the fifth president of PAS, Haji Yusof Rawa, noted that: 'Asri was a mixed personality and he had his good points as well as his bad ones. Asri's own religious credentials were not so impressive. His religious education stopped in Malaysia. He only went to local Malay madrasah. Like Burhanuddin, Asri's commitment to Islam was coloured and shaped by his nationalism. At the time, it seemed that what he did was for the good of the party. But there are also many people who think that his record was more 50-50. During that time, when PAS was with UMNO in the Barisan, there were many PAS members who benefited as well. Some of us were made deputy ministers, ambassadors, etc. But many others disagreed with Asri's policy of negotiation and co-operation with UMNO. They did not believe that it could work and felt that it was immoral. In the end, it was clear that PAS was being manipulated and used by the UMNO government. We had to leave the alliance and we learnt a lot from that experience. It was a bitter lesson for us. But we learnt to be self-reliant and we learnt to be careful when making alliances with other parties in the future.' (Interview with Haji Yusof Rawa, 18 August 1999.)

76 Alias, *Malaysia's Islamic Opposition*, p. 80.

77 The 'Three Abduls' (Abdul Halim Abdul Rahman, Wan Abdul Rahim Abdullah and Abdul Fatah Haji Harun) remained in PAS till 2000, when they were implicated in a plot to oust the chief minister of Kelantan and Murshid'ul Am of the party, Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat. The 'Three Abduls' crisis is related in Mohammad Sayuti Omar, *Hikayat Tok Guru dan Tiga Abdul*, Selangor: Tinta Merah, 2000.

78 Ibnu Hasyim, *PAS Kuasai Malaysia? 1950-2000 Sejarah Kebangkitan dan Masa Depan*, Kuala Lumpur: G Edar Press, 1993, p. 284.

79 Quoted in Ibnu Hasyim, *PAS Kuasai Malaysia?*, p. 292.

country's first Islamic party established in 1948 (of which he had been a member). Asri and HAMIM joined the BN coalition and contested against PAS in Kelantan, but by the 1986 election, the small party was effectively wiped out. HAMIM never managed to gain strong support in the state and during the party's general assembly in 1988 Asri Muda suggested dissolving the party and joining UMNO en masse. Once again he was defeated by his own followers who would no longer blindly follow his commands. Asri eventually left HAMIM, and ended up joining UMNO by himself. Alone and isolated, Asri Muda spent the final years of his political career in relative obscurity and never managed to regain his popularity. In 1991, he was awarded the *Tokoh Ma'al Hijrah* (Man of the Year) award by the king for his services to Islam and Malay-Muslim concerns in the country. In 1992, he was awarded the honorific title 'Tan Sri'. On 28 August 1992, he passed away after watching a news report about the killing of Muslims in Bosnia.

In summing up the Asri years we can see that, by the 1980s, Malay-Muslim politics was configured along three key ideas that oftentimes overlapped and spilled into one another. At the core of Malay politics was the idea of Malay identity itself, and whether Malaysia would or could be seen as a modern, plural and democratic nation-state that nonetheless reflected its Malay past and origins. For Asri Muda and his close supporters, this was the premise upon which Malaysian politics had to be conducted, and all the concerns of politics and governance were meant to be directed towards the preservation and upholding of the singular principle that Malaysia was primarily still *Tanah Melayu* – the Land of the Malays.

As we have seen above, this idea was one that had less and less traction among the new urban-based constituencies that were emerging in the country as a result of Malaysia's own successful development. For the non-Malays of the country, Asri's brand of Malay ethnonationalism was antithetical to their own interests and perception of themselves as equal citizens of a plural democractic society. For the upwardly mobile generation of Malay professionals and graduates, his Malaycentric worldview was perhaps too small for the young and ambitious who were then being sent to study in England, America and Australia, and whose own worldview had grown more global as a result.

Compounding matters further was the growing importance of two other ideas, Modernity and global Islamism, both of which were nodal points in their own respective discourses that viewed the world differently. For the modernist Muslims who were enamoured by the claims of capital-driven development and globalisation, being a Malay-Muslim was not an impediment to progress and economic success. The great appeal of UMNO then,

as we have seen above, was the perception that it could produce a new generation of modern professional Malay-Muslims who would deliver the promise of an authentic Asian-Muslim Modernity within one's lifetime.

On the other side of the ideological divide were the globalised Islamists who saw the state as the vehicle for an even grander – and psychologically deeper – transformation of the consumer-subject into the *homo Islamicus* of the 20th century. The new generation of Islamist activists, respectful though they were to the ulama for spiritual guidance – were nonetheless the products of Malaysia's development, too; and many of them happened to be Malay-Muslim youth who had benefited from the government's development policies and had been sent to study abroad. While in the universities of London, Leeds, Manchester and elsewhere, they had been exposed to the ideas of Maudoodi, Qutb, al-Banna and the like, and had returned to Malaysia with a different idea of what Malaysia's Islamic Modernity ought to look like.

All three streams of ideas – Malay ethnonationalism, capital-driven Modernity and global Islamism – would henceforth remain as permanent contenders on the discursive landscape of Malaysian politics, and this is still the case today. Although Asri himself had met his end at the hands of the party he had helped to build from its infancy, his brand of Malay ethnonationalist thought would linger and occasionally reappear, more than three decades after his own political demise. For the moment however, Malaysians would bear witness to a struggle between the Modernists and the Islamists, who would do battle for the hearts and minds of Malaysia's Muslims. As the TV screen was filled with images of angry demonstrators taking to the streets of Tehran, Malaysia braced itself for a renewed – and increasingly violent – struggle between UMNO and PAS, as both parties clamoured for the prize of being the sole true defender of Islam.

3 PAS in the Global Islamist Wave: 1982-1999

> The rise of Islamism was only possible when the availability of Islam could be articulated into a counter-hegemonic discourse.
> Bobby Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*[1]

1982: The *Ulama* era begins

> The image of PAS changed according to the tone set by the Shia revolution in Iran which gave such a high status to the ulama in the field of government … Many felt that their (ulama) personalities manifested the spirit of Islamic leadership that they were looking for all this time. Therefore the ulama became the object of adoration and respect for those who fought for the Islamist cause in society.[2]
> Badlihisham Mohamad Nasir, *Isu Personaliti Dalam Gerakan Islam Tanah Air*

From 1982 the Pan-Malaysian Islamist party came under the leadership of the 'ulama faction', and subsequently transformed itself into a more conservative, oppositional and, at times, even revolutionary party. This did not, however, mean that PAS had discarded the internationalism of the era of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, and nor did it reject the Malay-Muslim ethnonationalism of the Asri years. As we shall see below, PAS's politics by the 1980s and 1990s would be marked by all three strains of Malay-Muslim thought and the party itself would grow progressively more complex as a result.

It ought to be noted that whatever revolutionary potential that PAS had was always there from the beginning. As I have argued in chapter one, it was between the late 19th to early 20th centuries that political Islam across Southeast Asia took on a more confrontational stance, and it was during this period that the region witnessed the first instances of violent anti-colonial opposition from the Islamist forces in British Malaya, the Dutch East Indies and Spanish Philippines. By the 1950s and 1960s, however, this radical brand of Islamism, predicated as it was on the desire to rid the Muslim world of

1 Bobby Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*, London: Zed Books, 1997, p. 73.

2 Badlihisham Mohamad Nasir, 'Isu Personaliti dalam Gerakan Islam Tanah Air', *Tamadun*, August 1999, p. 37.

colonialism, was transformed into something more internationalist in scope, tone and tenor. PAS in the 1950s and 1960s was one of several anti-colonial parties and movements that shared similar ambitions with other anti-colonial movements, some of them secular in outlook and values. This was an era when Muslim activists worldwide entertained the notion of a grander pan-Islamic alliance that would transcend the confines of ethnonationalism that was limited by the logic of the nation-state and national borders.

The era of PAS's internationalism then gave way to PAS's next avatar as the defender of exclusive Malay-Muslim rights. The man who was largely responsible for this was the mercurial Asri Muda who led the party from victory to defeat, thanks to his own miscalculations and overestimation of his own popularity. But Asri Muda did not invent Malay ethnonationalism on his own: The discourse of Malay ethnonationalism was always there, thriving as it did on the collective insecurities of the first generation of Malay Malayans/Malaysians who saw themselves on the verge of economic and political marginalisation in their own country. If Asri was able to perform the manoeuvres he did, it was partly due to the fact that he had an appreciative audience – at least up to the 1960s and the mid-1970s.

What these two distinct periods tell us – as well as the third period of PAS's struggle in the 1980s and 1990s – is that the discursive landscape of postcolonial Malaysia was one where several competing religio-political discourses were available and on offer. For the leaders and members of PAS, like their counterparts in UMNO and the other parties of the land, the range of political choices at their disposal and the horizon of possibility for their political activities were by and large defined by the range of alternatives at hand. Islam – understood in the widest sense as not only a belief system but also a repertoire of symbols, ideas and vocabulary – furnished these movements with a discursive economy through which their political ambitions could be framed. But as we have seen earlier, the availability of Islam as a repertoire of symbols and vocabulary also meant that it was forever available to *all* Muslims who wanted to use it as a means to build a worldview of their own. This rendered it particularly vulnerable to contestation, as it was claimed and contested not only by PAS but also by other parties and movements such as UMNO, ABIM, JIM, *Darul Arqam*, the *Tablighi Jama'at*, Sufi groups and so on. By the early 1980s it had become evident that Islam had come to dominate the discursive space of the public domain, thanks to the contestation between PAS and UMNO. In the Islamisation race that was the outcome of their heated competition, Islam and its symbols came to permeate almost all levels and areas of Malaysian society.

Discourses, however, do not simply succeed and become hegemonic on the basis of a good argument or a convincing picture that they give of

the world. Apart from the availability of such a discourse, its success or failure is also determined by the context in which it finds itself. In the 1950s and 1960s, Dr. Burhanuddin had attempted to articulate a discourse of anti-colonial Islamism that was predicated on a notion of Islamist internationalism, that unfortunately bore striking resemblances to the internationalism of the radical left. Working as he did at the peak of the Cold War, the subject-positions that he and the leaders of PAS assumed put them in the same category as the radical left who were likewise committed to end the last vestiges of neo-colonialism and to bring about a radical change to the political economy of so many postcolonial states. As we have seen earlier, this rendered PAS vulnerable to the charge that it was a left-leaning crypto-socialist Islamist party that was working hand-in-glove with Communists in both Malaya/Malaysia and Indonesia. PAS's internationalism floundered and crashed on the hard rocks of *realpolitik*, at a time when the fear of the Communist Internationale was strong enough to justify the use of underhanded tactics and even violence to counter the perceived Communist threat. If PAS had failed in the 1960s, its failure was as much due to the overbearing pressure brought to bear on the global left in general as it was its own.

Asri Muda's ethnonationalist Islamism was likewise a discourse that emerged from a very specific historical-cultural context, and which likewise stammered and stuttered in the face of new political realities. By the time Asri had come to power, his brand of exclusive and parochial ethnonationalism was confronted by the reality of a Muslim world that had begun to open itself up to the West and the logic of neo-liberalism. In Egypt, for instance, Galal Amin (2000) had noted that by the 1970s, the Pan-Arab nationalism of Gammel Nasser had given way to a wave of economic reforms instituted by Anwar Sadat.[3] The Nasserite elites who had occupied themselves with the task of economic planning, economic nationalism and the protection of native Egyptian political and economic interests (all ideals that Asri would have sympathised with) were replaced by a new generation of Western-educated economists and economic planners who set out to develop the economy along Western-liberalist lines. Social mobility and new social classes were the result of the opening up of Egyptian society, and the classics of Arabic literature were soon superceded by the icons of Western (notably American) pop culture: Coca Cola, jeans, pop music and Hollywood films. Like Dr. Burhanuddin before him, Asri Muda found himself out of time;

3 Galal Amin, *Whatever Happened to the Egyptians?* American University of Cairo Press, Cairo, 2000.

his strident calls for the defence of the Malay-Muslim position came at a time when the country was opening up and when a new market economy was being put into place. Once again, we see that although the discourse of Islamism was available, it still did not fit into a context that would allow it to thrive and prosper.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, the context was set to change yet again. All over the Muslim world the capital-driven, Western-inspired developmental model was beginning to show signs of internal structural and ideological crisis. Anwar Sadat had opened up a Pandora's box of popular expectations through his liberal economic outlook. As the older value system began to change thanks to the market economy, Egypt's political system and bureaucracy buckled under the pressure: Public education, public transport, public housing and other services associated with the state had begun to falter as a new generation of market-oriented Egyptians grew more possessively individualistic. For those who failed to succeed in the new free economy, Islam was there as a remedy to their personal and social ills, as it promised at least a notion of a pious society that was equal in the eyes of God, despite the evident inequalities in the streets of Cairo. A similar crisis of faith in modern laissez-faire economics was taking in Iran, the outcome of which would have an immediate and lasting impact on Malaysia.

By 1979, the Shah of Iran was likewise facing a revolution on his doorstep. Disdainful of traditional Islamists whom he cast as 'backward' and blamed for the decline of Iran, the Shah had attempted to force his nation into the modern age at the point of a bayonet, but to no avail. When it finally erupted the Iranian revolution sent shock waves throughout the world. The Ayatollah Khomeini, the ulama once derided as 'an old man with lice in his beard' had inspired and led a revolution which resulted in the fall of the *ShahanShah* (King of Kings) and 'Light of the Aryans'. Western intellectuals, politicians and media experts were confounded by the outcome of the 1978-79 popular uprising in Iran and could not understand how the people could have opted for such a radical alternative. As the Shah (dubbed the 'suitcase monarch') packed his bags and flew off into exile, the incoming flight from Paris that brought home Ayatollah Khomeini on 1 February 1979 seemed to bring with it the hopes and dreams of a glorious new future.

Khomeini called on the army and police to support the revolutionaries and to help them in their endeavour to create a new society in Iran. This brave new world was created through the execution of political opponents (such as the *Mujahideen-e Khalq*), the purging of secular academics from the universities and the arrest, detention and execution of thousands of 'deviants', including homosexuals, prostitutes and other so-called 'social misfits'.

Non-Islamist political parties and movements such as the Tudeh party were banned, and political life came under the near-absolute monopoly of the ulama and Islamist revolutionaries. A new Islamic constitution was introduced, and the latest chapter in the history of Iran began on 1 April 1979 when Khomeini declared it to be 'the first day of the government of God'[4] – which was an ironic declaration to say the least, as it echoed the totalising ambitions of the French revolutionaries centuries before. PAS, then labouring under the last days of Asri Muda, sat up and took note.

That PAS would have been affected by the Iranian revolution is hardly a surprise, and the governments of Malaysia and its ASEAN neighbours were worried about the possible long-term impact of the revolution on their own countries.[5] Soon after the revolution, the younger generation of PAS leaders like Mohamad Sabu began using the Ayatollah's revolutionary rhetoric in their speeches and were condemning the US as the *Syaitan Besar* (Great Satan). The thought that thousands of Malay-Muslim students might take to the streets in violent demonstrations against the government became the ongoing nightmare for those in power, particularly as the number of students enrolled in religious schools was growing.[6]

It was hardly surprising that Southeast Asian governments were perturbed by the developments in Iran. In Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines, dissident Islamist parties and movements openly supported the Iranian revolution and its underlying principles. In Indonesia, groups like the *Komando Jihad* under the leadership of Islamist firebrands like Imran bin Zein began mobilising their followers and issuing a call to arms, taking the Iranian revolution as their cue. In Malaysia leaders of ABIM (then under Anwar Ibrahim) praised the Iranian revolutionaries for their commitment to Islam. In 1979, Anwar and other ABIM leaders visited Iran and met Ayatollah Khomeini. Upon his return, Anwar called for an 'Iranian Liberation and Solidarity Day' to be held on 16 March 1979.[7] Chandra Muzaffar (1987) has observed that the Iranian revolution marked a turning point in the development of PAS as well as other Islamist movements like ABIM

4 Dilip Hiro, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, London: Pelican Press, 1988, p. 169.

5 See: Fred R. von der Mehden, 'Malaysian and Indonesian Islamic Movements and the Iranian Connection' and Cesar Adib Majul, 'The Iranian Revolution and the Muslims of the Philippines', in John Esposito (ed.), *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact*, Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990.

6 In 1980, about 14% of Malaysia's total student population was estimated to be engaged in pure Islamic studies. (Quoted in Shanti Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, London: Routledge and ISEAS, 1997, p. 116.)

7 Mehden, 'Malaysian and Indonesian Islamic Movements and the Iranian Connection', p. 248.

as it provided them with tangible proof that an Islamist alternative was, after all, a possibility.[8]

Inspired by these developments, the Ulama faction within PAS pressed for changes, and in 1982 finally go their way: With the resignation of Asri Muda the leadership of the Islamist party came under the control of its fiery-tempered fifth president, Ustaz Yusof Rawa, Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat and the 'Young Turks' of ABIM.

Ustaz Yusof bin Abdullah al-Rawa and PAS's Renewed *Jihad* of the 1980s

> Any Muslim who is not brave enough to take part in a jihad cannot call himself a real man, because a real man would not run away when he is called upon to undertake a jihad. All Muslims must prepare themselves for jihad to show that they are prepared to do anything to ensure the victory of Allah.
>
> Ustaz Yusof Rawa, *Harakah,* 26 June 1987

The ascendancy of Ustaz Yusof Rawa, Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat, Ustaz Fadhil Noor and the ulama faction within PAS occurred at a time when the discourse of radical Islamism met with new socio-economic and structural-institutional changes that altered the political and discursive landscape of Malaysia. It seemed as if a moment had arrived when the renewed challenge by PAS coincided with real and visible changes in the country.

Yusof Rawa is credited for having altered the form and content of PAS's politics in the 1980s. Popularly known as Pak Yusof, he was born in Penang on 8 May 1922. Like the third president of PAS, Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy, Yusof Rawa's family came from neighbouring Indonesia. His father, Haji Abdullah Mohamad Noordin al-Rawa, was an immigrant from West Sumatra who harboured a deep distrust of the British and Dutch colonial regimes in Malaya and the Dutch East Indies. His mother was a Sumatran woman, Asmah binti Haji Salleh. Like many migrant families, Yusof Rawa's parents settled in the British crown colony of Penang, where his father established his own printing and publishing business called the Maktabah Haji Abdullah Nordin Arrawi. The family settled in the Rawanese settlement known as Kampung Rawa (close to Masjid Melayu), and Yusof was born in his family home at Lebuh Aceh.

8 Chandra Muzaffar, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, Petaling Jaya: Fajar Bakti Press, 1987, p. 36.

Penang, as we have seen earlier, was then a busy cosmopolitan metropole that was home to a number of indigenous and migrant communities. For decades it had been the home of Malays, Acehnese, Minangs, Rawanese, Bugis, Madurese, Javanese as well as Chinese, Indians, Arabs, Turks and Europeans. The tenor of Islam and Islamic discourse in the port city was thus an open, dynamic and highly cosmopolitan one. Growing up in Penang meant that Yusof Rawa was exposed to the developments taking place in other parts of the Muslim world, and was aware of the rise of parties and movements such as the Muslim League of India, the *Jama'at-e Islami* and the *Ikhwan'ul Muslimin* of the Arab world too. In his youth he first studied at Sekolah Melayu Jalan Carnavon, and later at Sekolah Chaurausta. His secondary education was at the Government English School and then Penang Free School (which had produced other prominent Malay nationalist leaders and politicians such as Tunku Abdul Rahman, the country's first prime minister). The future PAS president dreamt of becoming a lawyer and entering the Malayan legal service, but his father was unhappy with the kind of secular education his son was receiving. His strict disciplinarian outlook and orthodox approach to religion convinced him that his son was being 'Westernised' by the colonial education system. Finally he decided to send his son abroad to take up Islamic studies at the Ma'ahad Al-Fallah in Mecca.

In Mecca, Yusof Rawa found himself in an environment far away from the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Penang. Having grown up in a society where social interaction (including interaction between the sexes) was commonplace, he was struck by the conservative atmosphere of Arabian society which had come under the sway of the Wahhabi school of thought. At the Ma'ahad he studied Arabic along with religious subjects like *us'ul al-fiqh*, *tafsir*, *tauhid* and Islamic history. He graduated with honours, receiving the *ijazah thaqasur al-deeni*. Yet despite his academic achievements, Yusof Rawa was unhappy with the environment around Mecca. There he experienced for the first time the racism of the Arabs towards Malays and other non-Arab Muslims. On several occasions he found himself involved in petty conflicts and brawls with Arab youths who taunted the non-Arab students in Mecca. In was in Mecca that he came to realise that Muslims would never be united as long as they held on to the idea of ethnic differences.

In 1940 Yusof Rawa was ready to return to Malaya but his departure was interrupted by the advent of the Second World War. The human cost of the conflict was brought home to him when his father was killed during a Japanese bombing raid on Penang.

As a result of the conflict in Asia, Yusof Rawa was forced to continue his studies in Mecca. This turned out to be a stroke of luck, for it allowed him to

make contact with other Arabs and to further develop his own knowledge of Islam. He eventually made friends with Hosni Gamal, an Egyptian merchant who hired him as a clerk in his import-export firm. Impressed by Yusof Rawa's ability to read and write in English, Hosni Gamal promoted him to the post of translator and trade representative. It was then that Yusof Rawa took his first tentative steps into the world of Arab-Muslim politics. He came to know of prominent Islamist intellectuals like Muhammad Abduh and Hassan al-Banna through his meetings with Egyptian and Lebanese traders and activists.

Once back in Malaya, Yusof Rawa worked in his father's printing business in Penang, then called the Syarikat Percetakan al-Rawa. There he wrote numerous books on religious subjects like *tafsir*, *hadith* and religious practice, and published books on the Arabic language. He also published a biweekly magazine called *Al-Israh* that discussed matters of religion for a Malay readership. In his magazines and journals, Yusof Rawa discussed the theories of Islamist philosophers like Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Juzi. He also translated many articles and commentaries by Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. His publishing house published Malay translations of Qutb's *Ma'alim Fit Tariq* and *Fi Zilail Qur'an* (*In the Shade of the Qur'an*).

Yusof Rawa was thus one of the first to introduce the ideas of Sayyid Qutb to Malaya, and it was then that his interest in Islamist politics began. Yusof Rawa joined PAS in 1959 and took up the post of PAS secretary in Penang when Ustaz Ahmad Azam moved to the mainland. He also served in the party's central committee (*jawatankuasa agong*) and over the years rose to become one of its most ardent spokesmen. From the moment he joined the party, Yusof Rawa was involved in the development and expansion of PAS activities in Penang and Kedah, where his own local constituency was based, and in time he came to be known as one of the leading PAS leaders in the northwest of the peninsula. In 1969, he was one of three PAS candidates who won a parliamentary seat in Kedah (Kota Setar Selatan constituency) after defeating UMNO candidate Dr. Mahathir Mohamad to whom he was distantly related.[9]

Yusof Rawa had risen up the ranks of PAS when it was led by Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy. During Asri Muda's presidency (1970-82) he rose even

9 Yusof Rawa was related to Dr. Mahathir's wife, Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, whose father was also from Rawa, near Medan, Sumatra. The two were second cousins, and the conflict between Yusof Rawa and Mahathir Mohamad was spoken of in the constituency as a 'family conflict' between cousins. While there were real political and ideological differences between the two men, neither side had any personal enmity towards the other (Interview with Marina Mahathir, 5 May 2000).

higher up the party hierarchy. When Asri brought his Islamist party into the BN government in 1973, a number of important PAS leaders were given government posts by Tun Razak. In 1973, Yusof Rawa was appointed as Malaysia's representative to the United Nations in New York.[10] A year later, he was made deputy minister in the primary industries ministry after winning his parliamentary seat during the 1974 election unchallenged. In 1975, he was appointed Malaysian ambassador to Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan. Despite his deteriorating health, Yusof Rawa continued to carry out his duties at breakneck pace.[11] Other prominent PAS ulama like Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat were also given important posts within the state's religious bureaucracy.

It was in Iran that Yusof Rawa had witnessed the final days of the Shah of Iran and was deeply moved by the resolve and determination of the Iranian revolutionaries who were prepared to sacrifice their lives for a political goal at a time when the leadership of the country seemed ideologically bankrupt. The same ideological bankruptcy was evident in Yusof Rawa's own party at the time. Asri Muda's constant U-turns on matters of policy and ideology created the impression that PAS was devoid of purpose and a sense of direction. Leaders of the other Islamist movements in the country were hardly any better. Yusof Rawa and the ulama of PAS were shocked by the 'betrayal' of another Muslim activist and leader whom they hoped would join their party: Anwar Ibrahim. When told that Anwar had abandoned ABIM and joined UMNO, Yusof Rawa's reaction was blunt and to the point. He said to Anwar: 'Your decision was like a stab in the back to us."[12]

Developments in Malaysia and abroad convinced the ulama leaders of PAS that the party had to abandon Asri's path of ethnonationalism and reinvent itself anew; the emergence of new Islamist groupings abroad such as *Hizbullah* came at a time when PAS was undergoing yet another radical change in its identity. However, the trajectories of these movements were never quite the same. While *Hizbullah* began as a radical militant movement that eventually adjusted its tactics to suit the democratic political process, PAS was going in the other direction by adopting an increasingly militant and confrontational discourse that put it on a collision course with the state. In 1982, the irreconcilable gulf between PAS and UMNO widened even more

10 Mujahid Rawa, *Permata dari Pulau Mutiara*, p. 83.

11 Yusof Rawa's first serious bout of illness was a minor heart attack in 1976 during the International Conference of Ambassadors in Kuala Lumpur. His doctors advised him to stop working for three months and to stick to a strict diet, as he had already been diagnosed with diabetes (Ibid., p. 104).

12 Ibid., p. 99.

when PAS ulama Tuan Guru Abdul Hadi Awang issued his controversial *amanat* (edict) based on his speech at Banggol Pradong in Terengganu, which listed 'ten major sins' that would effectively rob a Muslim of his or her chance to go to heaven.[13] Hadi claimed that the Malay-Muslim leaders of UMNO were *munafikin* (hypocrites) and that to confront a nominally Muslim government that fails to implement Islamic *hudood* law was part of the Muslim's jihad (struggle).[14] It was one of the first instances when a senior leader of PAS was openly declaring that ethnonationalism was un-Islamic, and that the nationalist UMNO party could not claim to represent Islam or Muslim interests. Needless to say, this was seen by UMNO as a provocation of the highest order. Hadi Awang's *amanat* echoed the confrontational polemics of other radical Islamist leaders and theologians of the time, and seemed to bring PAS closer to more radical groups like *Takfir wa'l-Hijrah* and *Tanzim al-Jihad* of Egypt.

On 1 May 1983, Yusof Rawa became the fifth president of the Pan-Malaysian Islamist Party, and the competition between PAS and UMNO was about to turn into an all-out confrontation.

That the 1980s would witness the worst instances of violence between PAS and the Malaysian state seems understandable in retrospect. From 1982 onwards, PAS's own ideological and religious orientation would be altered thanks to the efforts of its new leaders, who aimed to turn the party into a vehicle for socio-political change intended to capture the state. But how the capture of the state was to be attained was decided in part by the rhetoric of the new leadership, who raised the stakes in the contestation between PAS and UMNO even higher. PAS under Yusof Rawa and the *ulama* soon developed a reputation as an Islamist party vehemently opposed to *asabiyyah* (communalism or ethnocentrism), *sekularisme* (secularism) and the *maddiyyah* (materialist culture) of capitalist development promoted by the UMNO-led government of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. As Mujahid Rawa (son of Yusof Rawa) was to write later:

> PAS's identity as a political party was slowly changed to that of a missionary party that asked the people to worship Allah, to do good and to eschew evil. This shift in identity left a great impact on PAS then and now. Had PAS been merely a political party working for victory

13 Al-Afghani, *Dagangnya Dibeli Allah*, Memali: Penerbitan al-Jihadi, 2000, p. 84.
14 Alias Mohamed, *Malaysia's Islamic Opposition: Past, Present and Future*, Kuala Lumpur: Gateway Publishing, 1991, p. 83.

> at elections, PAS would have been wiped off the political map of the country a long time ago.[15]

In his speech 'Ke Arah Pembebasan Ummah' ('Towards the Emancipation of the *Ummah*') delivered during the 29th PAS general assembly on 29 April 1983, Yusof Rawa rejected the ideology of ethnonationalism on the grounds that it was fundamentally a form of *asabiyyah* which was a throwback from the age of ignorance (*jahiliyyah*) before the coming of Islam.[16] Although previous PAS leaders had also defended the cause of Malay rights and Malay nationalism, the new leadership was not prepared to tolerate any form of politics that was in any way 'contaminated' by ethnocentric concerns, which they regarded as *asabiyyah*. As Chandra notes:

> Fighting narrow nationalism which the party (PAS) described as *asabiyyah* was a major plank in its political platform. PAS (under Yusof Rawa) saw *asabiyyah* as a product of colonial thinking, preserved and perpetuated by Western intellectual dominance. Secularism had helped to rationalise and legitimise *asabiyyah* in the same way that it had helped to preserve other intellectual fallacies too. PAS was of the opinion that *asabiyyah* had caused havoc all over the world. Guided by its rejection of *asabiyyah,* PAS criticised a number of government policies such as the New Economic Policy (NEP), for instance.[17]

Yusof Rawa's critique of ethnonationalism was sustained the following year (1984) in his speech entitled 'Menggempur Pemikiran Asabiyyah' ('Confronting the Mentality of *Asabiyyah*'). For the rest of the decade, this would be the tone taken by Rawa and the leaders of PAS, who argued that ethnonationalism had failed to secure the needs and interests of Muslims the world over, and had instead divided them and by doing so guaranteed the impossibility of a global Muslim *ummah* that was united as one against its enemies.

As a result of his long exposure to the realities of life faced by Muslims in countries like Arabia, Egypt and Iran, Rawa felt that political Islam could only succeed if it looked at the political struggle from a long-term, global perspective. On the surface of it, it appeared as if Yusof Rawa was reiterating the calls for Muslim internationalism that dated back to the era

15 Mujahid, *Permata dari Pulau Mutiara*, p. 95.
16 Kamaruddin, *Memperingati Yusof Rawa*, p. 30.
17 Chandra, *Islamic Resurgence in Malaysia*, pp. 56-57.

of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy. Like Burhanuddin who had found inspiration in the projects of Nasser and Sukarno in Egypt and Indonesia, Yusof Rawa was moved by what he saw was happening in Iran. But the difference lay in Rawa's emphasis on *who* should be the one(s) to unite the Muslims of the postcolonial world, and his own answer was a simple one: the ulama.

From 1983 the leadership of PAS had begun the process of repositioning the ulama in the pivotal position of being the custodians of Muslim orthodoxy, identity and community. During his first address to the members of the Islamist party he clearly stated that the Iranian revolution was *the model* to be emulated, for it had set the precedent for the leadership of the ulama:

> The victory of the Muslim *ummah* in Iran in freeing themselves from the oppressive yoke of the tyrants and those who attempted to force upon them a different orientation of life through the puppet regime of the Shah is an important event in the history of Islam today. The victory shows that Muslims who hold on to their faith and their belief in Allah are able to confront their oppressors who cling on to their materialist beliefs and faith in worldly power. *The uniqueness of the Iranian revolution lies in the fact that it was started by Muslims who held on to their beliefs and were guided by the ulama.* ... That is why the Iranian revolution has been able to deliver true freedom in the sense that it has allowed the people to faithfully return to the practice of their religion and it has allowed for the elevation of Islam to the level of a way of life that penetrates into all areas of society. The success of the Iranian revolution has added to our resolve and conviction about the success of Islam in the future ... *We must learn from the success of the Iranian revolution so that we too can develop our will and ability to struggle.* (Emphasis mine)[18]

The tone had thus been set for the confrontation against the nefarious '*golongan nasionalis asabiyyah sekular*' (secular *asabiyyah* ethnonationalists). And Rawa maintained that 'the ulama will play their part in saving the country from the deviation of the secular nationalists who have allowed themselves to be turned into the puppets of their colonial masters and who have become the slaves of secularism. The ulama will come to the fore in this struggle (jihad) and they will take up the burden of leadership that was passed on to the Prophets of the past who have been sent to us by Allah almighty'.[19]

18 Ibid., pp. 43-44.
19 Ibid., p. 81.

But the ulama alone could not win power and capture the state without a means of doing so, and for this the party was a necessity. The repositioning of the ulama at the centre of Muslim society and politics came at a time when Yusof Rawa and the leaders of PAS were also repositioning the ulama at the centre and top of PAS's organisational structure. PAS, as a party, was set on the course of a serious party-institutional make-over throughout the 1980s. The looseness of the party's leadership and membership structure gave way to new rites and rituals of mutuality and association that turned PAS into one of the most highly organised and disciplined cadre organisations in the country. Gone were the days of multiple membership: With Yusof Rawa at the helm, the members of PAS were made to swear an oath of allegiance (*ba'yat*) to the Islamist party and to promise that they would not be affiliated with other Islamist or Muslim movements in the country, including ABIM, *Darul Arqam,* the *Tablighi Jama'at*, or any other contender to the role of Islam's guardian in Malaysia.[20] In their ideological orientation and worldview (*fikrah*), party members had to commit themselves to the *fikrah* of PAS and none other. PAS, for Yusof Rawa, was meant to be the one and only *harakah Islamiyyah* in the country, and the only party that would promote and uphold the *daulah Islamiyyah* (Islamic rule). Those outside the party were effectively beyond the pale of the Islamic struggle, and neither would there be any room for waverers and fence-sitters.

It was then that PAS also turned itself into a cadre-based party that was based on the practice of *tarbiyyah* (study circles). The leaders of PAS argued that it was not enough for their members to simply join an Islamist party, but that they needed to learn and understand how and why PAS was also different from the other parties and movements in the country. From the 1980s onwards, the study circles of PAS were instrumental in developing a new, mass base of PAS members who would henceforth internalise and reproduce the ideology of the party as it had been taught to them. The party also introduced the practice of *usrah* (group meetings), intended to bring party members together and to encourage them to understand, develop and propagate the ideology of the party among themselves as well as among non-members.[21] *Tamrin* (prayer meeting) sessions were often held by PAS members, sometimes twice a month. *Qiamulail* (evening prayer) sessions were also held on every Thursday evening.[22] As cadres, the members of PAS were under the supervision and mentorship of more

20 Al-Afghani, *Suamiku Kekasih Allah*, Memali: Penerbitan al-Jihadi, 1999, p. 22.

21 Al-Afghani, *Dagangnya Dibeli Allah*, p. 85.

22 Ibid., p. 88.

senior members who would monitor their progress and police their conduct and behaviour. PAS's Islamism had evolved from something skin-deep to something more existential, creeping into the subjective recesses of each and every member.

The new PAS of the 1980s held a special appeal to the younger generation of Malaysian Muslims then. Compared to the PAS of the 1970s that was more a Malay rather than an Islamist party, this version of PAS – complete with its new membership recruitment system, internal mechanisms of discipline, stricter moral guidelines – met with the approval of a younger generation of Malaysian student activists who had grown progressively more disillusioned with the capital-driven development model that had been attempted all over the postcolonial Muslim world. As Mohd Hatta Ramli[23] has pointed out, it was during this time that PAS experienced its first major influx of university-educated activists and intellectuals from the local and foreign campuses, such as Nashruddin Mat Isa[24] (who later become PAS secretary-general) and Hatta Ramli.[25]

23 Mohd Hatta Ramli, 'Allahyarham Haji Yusof Rawa', p. 16.

24 Nashruddin Mat Isa was born in Negeri Sembilan in 1962. His early education (till 1979) was at St. Gabriel's Secondary School in Kuala Lumpur. Nashruddin's first contact with PAS was in 1984 when studying at Institut Teknologi Mara (ITM). After several terms at ITM, he studied at Dar'ul 'Ulum Deoband in India (1984). There his links with PAS were strengthened by increased contact with PAS leaders who visited India. After graduating from Deoband he continued his studies in *shariah* law in Jordan (1990). There he established his own research and teaching group, using the *usrah* model developed by PAS. While abroad he studied several languages including Arabic, English and French. After returning to Malaysia in 1993 he became an assistant lecturer in the UIA Law Faculty. His involvement with PAS intensified as soon as he returned to Malaysia: He was immediately elected to the committee for *lajnah tarbiyyah* and international affairs. He was also elected to the Dewan Pemuda committee for two terms. In 1997, he received a masters degree in comparative law from UIA. He resigned from UIA and joined UKM's Department of Law, where he taught and studied for his Ph.D. But on 14 June 1999, he was elected as secretary general of PAS, which forced him to leave his teaching post.

25 Mohd Hatta Ramli was born on 11 September 1956 in Sitiawan, Perak. His early education was at Malay College, Kuala Kangsar. He then studied medicine at UKM (grad. 1982) followed by Public Health at the National University of Singapore (NUS) (grad. 1988). He served as a medical officer with the Ministry of Health (1982-94), and later lectured at UKM Medical Faculty (1994-98). Mohd Hatta entered politics as soon as he began working in the government service. He joined PAS in 1983, just one year after Mohammad Asri Muda had been deposed and the ulama faction had taken over. He rose to become a member of the central committee and personal political secretary to the party's sixth president, Ustaz Fadzil Noor. He was also appointed deputy director of the PAS Research Centre in Kuala Lumpur. In 1998, he resigned his lecturer's post at the peak of the political crisis that followed the 1997 East Asian financial collapse.

That so many of the younger Malay-Muslim students in Malaysia and abroad were attracted to PAS at the time was also a symptom of the changes taking place the world over then. Compared to their parents who may have studied in the West in the 1940s and 1950s, those who were sent to Europe and North America in the 1970s had witnessed another version of the West which they regarded as decadent and in decline. The net effect of this mass disillusionment with the West was a return to Islam, which ironically boosted the ranks of the Malaysian Islamist party.[26]

Yusof Rawa and the leaders of PAS were acutely aware of the fact that they stood to gain from the frustration of the jaded younger generation. As he had seen himself in the streets of Tehran, any revolutionary movement would require the help of the younger generation who were less adverse to risk and thus willing to confront the state. It was with this in mind that Rawa opened the way for these younger Islamist activists and intellectuals to have a more prominent and visible role in the Islamic party. While he maintained that the ulama had the most important role to play in guiding the *harakah Islamiyyah* and leading the *al-jihad al-Islamiy*, Yusof Rawa saw the need to bring in graduates, professionals and intellectuals to help plan the party's policies. To this end, he expanded the scope of activities of the *Dewan Ulama* and renamed it the *Dewan Ulama dan Intelektual Islam* (Council of Ulama and Islamist Intellectuals) in the very first year of his presidency. He explained the opening up of the party's leadership structure in the following terms:

> The reconstruction of the individual Muslim through the process of education and *tarbiyyah* will be the task of the new Council of Ulama and Islamist Intellectuals, that will be given an important role thanks to the reforms of the party that are about to be put into place. The ulama and Islamist intellectuals happen to be a powerful and important force in our struggle to uplift the level of understanding among the Muslim *ummah* today. The entire membership of PAS, both ordinary members and party leaders, must lend their efforts to help the ulama and the Islamist intellectuals achieve their objectives in this new environment in which we are working. The creation of the new

26 Farish A. Noor, 'Islamisation by Degrees: Europe in the Formation of New Islamist Consciousness among Malaysian Students and Activists between the 1970s and the 1990s', paper for the International Conference on Cosmopolitanism, Human Rights, and Sovereignty in Multicultural Europe organised by the Institute of European Studies, UC Berkeley, and the Centre for Global, International, and Regional Studies, UC Santa Cruz, 4-5 May 2001.

> Council of Ulama and Islamist Intellectuals is meant to bridge this gulf of knowledge that once existed between them, and it will bring together the knowledge and experience of both sides on the conceptual and practical level, eradicating the dualism that once divided the knowledge of the *shariah* from secular worldly knowledge.[27]

Note that from the outset the aim of bridging the gap between the ulama and the intellectuals was to '*eradicate the dualism that once divided knowledge of the shariah from secular worldly knowledge*'. This suggested that while the ulama leaders of PAS were keen to benefit from the worldly technical expertise of the younger intellectual-activists – in terms of their organisational skills, economic management, etc. – they were equally concerned to ensure that such knowledge would be *Islamised* in turn, leaving no room for secular ideas and values that were antithetical to PAS's renewed Islamist enterprise.

Against the Secular State: Violence and Confrontation in PAS's politics of the 1980s

> The State has become the primary determinant of the dominant discourse on Islam in Malaysia to which all alternative groups must or have necessarily responded.[28]
>
> Shanti Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy* (1997)

It ought to be noted that even as PAS was busy with the task of re-inventing itself as a more confrontational Islamist party there were still dissident elements in its ranks. Not all the leaders and members of the party were comfortable with the increasingly confrontational rhetoric of the ulama, and some PAS leaders like Ustaz Abu Bakar Hamzah warned the party members about the danger of creating a new generation of 'Ayatollahs' in the party, and the excessive loyalty that was now being demanded of the ordinary members.[29] He also warned PAS members to recognise the distinction between 'loyalty' and 'fanaticism', arguing that the shifts in

27 Kamaruddin, *Memperingati Yusof Rawa*, pp. 55-56.

28 Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, p. 41.

29 See, for instance, Abu Bakar Hamzah, 'Mengakui Kebenaran Suatu Kewajiban', *Watan*, 21 July 1988.

language and manners among the party members did not necessarily bring them any closer to realising their political goals.[30] The ground, however, had shifted by then and one of the factors that shaped the context of PAS's increasingly aggressive approach was the crisis of development that was taking place all over the postcolonial world at the time.

It is important to note that PAS's criticism of the UMNO-led government grew even more trenchant at the time when the Malaysian government had actually succeeded in weathering the global economic crisis of the mid-1980s by successfully courting large-scale foreign direct investment (FDI) from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.[31] PAS at the time was in a weakened state, having ejected its former President, lost the state of Kelantan and was engaged in a major overhaul of the party.

During the first half of the 1980s, the UMNO-led Federal government was responding to PAS's growing assertiveness with its own brand of state-sponsored Islamisation; that Malaysia's state-orchestrated Islamisation campaign took place when Dr. Mahathir was in power should come as no surprise, for as we have noted earlier, the Malaysian prime minister had his own ideas as to what Islam ought to look like in the modern age. In contrast to the Islamism of PAS which he painted as radical, revolutionary and fanatical, Dr. Mahathir promoted his own understanding of Islam that was modernist and pragmatic. As Shanti Nair writes:

> Domestically, Islamisation focused on the distinction between a 'moderate' Islam deemed more appropriate in the context of Malaysian society against more radical expressions which were unacceptable to the government. The conflict between 'moderate' and 'extreme', in effect, encompassed intra-Malay rivalry.[32]

30 Ibid.

31 Malaysia managed to squeeze its way out of the 1985-86 recession by actively courting more foreign direct investment (FDI), particularly from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Attractive investment programmes were offered to Japanese, Korean and Taiwanese companies. Many companies were invited to work with Malaysian concerns in pursuing joint projects, such as the manufacture of the first Malaysian car, the Proton Saga. This accommodative approach paid off in the short to medium term, as the Malaysian economy soon showed signs of recovery. The GDP growth rate rose from -1.1% in 1985 to 1% in 1986, 5% in 1987 and 9% in 1988. Okposin and Cheng (*Economic Crises in Malaysia*, pp. 110-111) have estimated that FDI contributions helped the Malaysian manufacturing sector grow by 20% during the second half of the 1980s, effectively taking Malaysia out of the recession and paving the way for the boom years that followed.

32 *Nair, Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, p. 91.

As early as 1981, the UMNO general assembly had issued a resolution that the federal and state Islamic councils should enforce and defend the 'purity of Islam'.[33] Under the Fourth Malaysia Plan of 1981 to 1986, the Malaysian government undertook a host of measures to define what Islam ought to mean in the public domain: The *Unit Akidah dan Ajaran Sesat* (Unit for Faith Protection and Deviationist Teachings) was revamped under the *Pusat Penyelidikan Islam* (Islamic Research Centre) to monitor and police the spread of 'deviationist' teachings in the country. Meanwhile, efforts were made to uplift the standard of Muslim education in Malaysia as well, and in 1983, the International Islamic University (IIU) of Malaysia was established.[34] Kuala Lumpur became the host to the International Conference on the Islamic Approach towards Technological Development (1983), Islamic Civilisation (1984), Islamic Thought (1984), International Islamic Symposium (1986), Islamic Economics (1987), Islam and Media (1987), Religious Extremism (1987) and Islam and the Philosophy of Science (1989).[35] Additionally, in 1983, the Malaysian Islamic Bank was opened for the first time. Soon after the Islamic Bank, the Takaful (Islamic insurance company) was launched, as well as the Lembaga Urusan Tabung Haji (LUTH) (Hajj Pilgrims Management Fund).

Despite these measures to bring Islam into the orbit of governance and state-management, the leaders of PAS maintained their opposition against the UMNO-led government whose developmental model they argued was essentially Western and capitalist. Even the Islamic Bank project was condemned by Islamist economists like Abdur Razzaq Lubis as a cosmetic attempt to bolster the government's Islamic credentials.[36] Compounding matters further was the fact that some of these state-sponsored Islamic institutions were themselves deeply enmeshed within the local corporate culture and were directly involved in some questionable dealings, which made it all the easier for the Islamists of PAS to dismiss them as being cosmetic in nature. (LUTH, for instance, was involved in the operations of

33 Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, p. 36.

34 Khoo Boo Teik, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: An Intellectual Biography of Mahathir Mohamad*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 176.

35 Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, p. 115.

36 For a critique of the Islamic Bank project, see Abdur-Razzaq Lubis, *Tidak Islamnya Bank Islam*, Georgetown: PAID Network, 1985. Lubis condemned the Islamic banking project in Malaysia on the grounds that the bank did not, and could not, represent a radical challenge to the existing global banking system rooted in the practice of interest. Lubis argued that the Islamic Bank in Malaysia was doing the same thing, merely collecting interest in a different form. Such nominal changes were for him cosmetic and ineffectual.

the Asian Rare Earth (ARE) company together with the Japanese company Mitsubishi Chemicals. ARE was later accused of dumping radioactive waste in Perak.)[37]

For PAS leaders like Yusof Rawa, the state-sponsored Islamisation programme of the UMNO-led state could only be seen as superficial as it took place within the context of a Malaysian economy that was embedded in the wider system of global (Western) capital. He condemned the state's Islamisation programme thus:

> Do these Islamic projects really give us the hope that we will one day escape from this vicious cycle and that our country will achieve independence in the truest sense of the word? The answer has to be 'no'. For the independence of our country is being obstructed by the global system sustained by the superpowers who have created this vicious cycle in the first place, and this global system cannot be undone by the efforts of a handful of people who pretend to be really committed to Islamisation but who have only offered us Islamisation programmes that are limited in their scope. [38]

Rawa spoke of the need for an Islamic movement united by a sense of *wehdatul fikri* (singular vision or thinking) and *wehdatul amal* (singular action), guided by the ulama who would lead the way in the *al-jihad al-Islamiy* (Islamic struggle). Far from being satisfied or impressed with initiatives such as the International Islamic University or the Malaysian Islamic Bank, PAS condemned the government all the more vociferously, accusing it of hypocrisy instead. The campaign to demonise and discredit the government eventually culminated in the *'kafir-mengafir'* crisis of the mid-1980s, when PAS went as far as accusing the leaders and members of UMNO of being *kafirs* (infidels), *munafikin* (hypocrites) and traitors to Islam. By then PAS was learning from other radical Islamist groups that had come to the fore in the 1970s and 1980s. The use of *takfir* (to accuse other Muslims of being

37 Asian Rare Earth (ARE) was a multinational concern that brought together Japanese Mitsubishi Chemicals and Malaysian BEH Minerals. LUTH was also a major partner in ARE. The company was first set up to extract rare trace elements from tin tailings, but the factory in Perak was also producing thorium hydroxide, a radioactive waste product which had to be disposed of. In the end, dumping sites were found in the state itself – first in the Papan area and later near Bukit Merah. Protests by local residents and environmental groups against the dumping led to an international outcry. (Re: Tan Sooi Beng, 'The Papan-Bukit Merah Protest', in *Tangled Web*, CARPA, 1988, pp. 28-29.)

38 Kamaruddin, *Memperingati Yusof Rawa*, pp. 52-53.

infidels) had become commonplace in other Muslim countries like Egypt due to the rise of extremist groups such as the *Takfir wa'l-Hijrah* (*Jama'at al-Muslimin*) and the *Tanzim al-Jihad*. Tuan Guru Hadi Awang's division of the Muslim community into two opposing camps: the party of God (*hizbullah*) and the party of the Devil (*hisbussyaitan*)[39] summed up the simplistic dialectics at work in PAS's new radical way of thinking and were taken straight out of the vocabulary of other radical Islamist groups such as the *Tanzim al-Jihad* of Egypt. And, as was the case in Egypt, the heightening of tension between the two sides led only to the breakdown of communication between both parties, and opened the way for confrontation of a more violent nature. The tension would peak in 1985, with the killing of the PAS leader Ustaz Ibrahim Mahmood Libya.[40]

That trouble waited around the corner seemed inevitable by then; by 1985, a number of PAS leaders had already been arrested, interrogated and detained by the state security forces for their revolutionary speeches against the government. Those detained included Ustaz Abu Bakar Chik, Ustaz Bunyamin Yaacob, Ustaz Latif Muhammad, Ustaz Ghazalli Hasbullah, Mahfuz Omar and Mohamad Sabu.[41] PAS leader Mohamad Sabu was detained because of his inflammatory speeches against Christian missionary groups active in the country which he claimed had been trying to convert Malay-Muslims. Another PAS leader, the outspoken Ustaz Ibrahim Mahmood (also known as Ibrahim Libya), had managed to escape arrest but was being hunted around the country.

Unrepentant but fearful for his own safety, Ibrahim Mahmood took refuge in the village of Charok Puteh, near Baling, Kedah.[42] Charok Puteh/Memali was then a small village populated by Malay rice farmers and rubber smallholders. It was there that Ustaz Ibrahim set up his own religious

39 Abdul Hadi Awang, *Hizbullah dan Hisbussyaitan*, Batu Caves: Jabatan Penerangan dan Penyelidikan PAS Pusat, 1984.

40 Ustaz Ibrahim Mahmood was a well-known ulama in Kedah who had studied at various *madrasah* and seminaries such as the Dar'ul 'Ulum Deoband in India and al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt Ustaz Ibrahim Mahmood's early education was in Malaysia. In his youth he studied at Sekolah Agama Ittifaqiah in Kampung Corak Puteh and later at Pondok Al-Khairah at Pokok Sena, Seberang Perai and the Madrasah of Nilam Puri, Kelantan. He then studied at Dar'ul 'Ulum Deoband in India before further studies at al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt and, later, the University of Tripoli in Libya (al-Afghani, *Perisai Memali*, p. 22).

41 Al-Afghani, *Perisai Memali*, p. 26.

42 The Memali incident actually took place in the village of Charok Puteh ('White River') near the village of Mali (later Memali). The two villages were separated by a small river which gave Charok Puteh its name. Ustaz Ibrahim's home and *madrasah* were in Charok Puteh, not Memali. Most of his followers came from the two villages and the rest of the surrounding *mukim* (district).

school, the Madrasah Islahiah Diniyyah.[43] As a preacher and local PAS leader, he had courted controversy on a number of occasions thanks to his inflammatory speeches. Even by PAS's standards then, his remarks were seen as being too bold for comfort, and on one occasion he was reported to have said during his sermon:

> If in Iran and Pakistan there have emerged legions of *mujahideen* and legions of *shuhada* (martyrs) who are prepared to die for the sake of religion, then why is it that we in Malaysia have not been able to create such a force that is prepared to die for the sake of the religion of Allah? This is what we need to emphasise among the young Muslims in our country, and among the youth of PAS in particular. We need to teach them, so that they will not die in vain. [44]

But time was running out for Ibrahim Libya. On 19 November 1985, the village of Memali was surrounded by state security forces, including both the army and the police. A total of 576 security and armed forces personnel were present, along with armoured vehicles.[45] Shortly after the ustaz had delivered his morning lecture (*kuliah subuh*) at the *madrasah*, the troops were ordered to move in. Ustaz Ibrahim and his followers resisted their entry with force, and the troops opened fire. In the course of the fighting, Ustaz Ibrahim was killed along with 14 of his followers, and 29 other villagers were wounded. The ustaz was shot by members of the *Unit Tindakan Khas* (Special Forces Unit, UTK).

The killing of Ibrahim Libya was the first instance when the Malaysian Islamist Party was subjected to the use of armed force by the state security apparatus, and signalled a radical shift in PAS-State relations. As Chandra has argued: 'Memali, in retrospect, was perhaps one of the most vivid demonstrations of the massive use of State power on behalf of the ruling élite.'[46] By openly advocating violent revolutionary activity against the government, Ibrahim had rendered dialogue between the two sides impossible. The government justified its actions on the grounds that Ibrahim had openly advocated violent revolution, had evaded arrest and had resisted attempts

43 Al-Afghani, *Operasi Kenari: Suatu Hukuman Tampa Bicara*, Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit Pemuda Press, 1990, p. 64.

44 Al-Afghani, *Perisai Memali*., pp. 77-78.

45 Khoo notes that 576 police and security personnel took part in the operation, though only 228 actually approached Ibrahim Libya's house and *madrasah* (Khoo Boo Teik, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism*, p. 256 n. 203).

46 Chandra, *Freedom in Fetters*, p. 334.

to arrest him. But PAS leaders were swift to respond to the government's depiction of events at Memali. Yusof Rawa and the PAS leaders exploited the event to the full, taking it as proof that the government of Dr. Mahathir was fundamentally opposed to Islam and the success of Islamist movements in the country. Ibrahim Libya and his followers were described by Yusof Rawa as martyrs (*syuhada*) who had died for the struggle of Islam against a *kafir* government led by the *mustakbirin* (oppressive) élite of UMNO. PAS condemned the UMNO-led government in toto, including ex-ABIM leader Anwar Ibrahim, who was a cabinet member at the time.[47]

The radicalisation of PAS coincided with the emergence of new, more radical movements in the region as well; such as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the southern Philippines and the *Barisan Bersatu Mujahideen Patani* (United Mujahideen Front of Patani, BBMP) in southern Thailand. It appeared as if the whole of Southeast Asia was witnessing the rise of radical revolutionary Islam, and against the backdrop of fear and anxiety PAS prepared itself for the General Elections of 1986. Overheated though PAS's own rhetoric was, nothing could have prepared the Islamists of PAS for the electoral disaster that was about to befall them.

The Islamists Falter: PAS's Nadir in 1986

PAS boldly marched towards the elections of 1986, perhaps overconfident of its own Islamist credentials and believing that it had demonstrated to the country that it was prepared to sacrifice labour, time and even lives to the Islamist cause. What it did not fully appreciate, however, was the Malaysian public's aversion to any form of violent radical politics in the country – which cost it dearly.

Religion had, by then, become the main issue at the elections, and the media was rife with talk of radical Islamists poised to take over the country by any means necessary. Meanwhile, the 1986 BN manifesto promised that Islam's position and status in the country would be guaranteed and that further efforts would be made to promote Islamic education in schools and to make Islam a 'way of life' for the Malaysian public.[48] Despite the extensive media campaign, the 1986 election registered a voter turnout of 68.1%, the lowest in the country's history then. The ruling BN coalition managed to win 57.6% of the votes, and 148 out of the 177 seats (83.6% of seats). For the

47 Al-Afghani, *Rakyat Makin Mantang*, p. 40.
48 Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, p. 36.

election campaign, PAS formed an informal alliance with the *Parti Sosialis Rakyat Malaysia* (PSRM) and *Parti Nasionalis Malaysia* (NASMA) to reduce the competition between the Malay opposition parties. PAS leaders also attempted to woo support from the non-Malay and non-Muslim sections of the electorate. PAS leaders like Ustaz Hadi Awang claimed that the party was willing to accept the idea of a non-Malay becoming the Prime Minister of the country, provided that the person was already a Muslim.[49]

The party also established Chinese consultative councils (CCC) with the hope of allaying the fears of the Chinese and non-Muslims in general.

However, by then PAS had done enough damage to its own reputation and image in the country. With the memory of the Memali incident still fresh in the minds of many, Malaysian voters remained perturbed by what PAS would do if it were to come to power. PAS's anti-*infidel* rhetoric had spooked not only the non-Muslims of Malaysia, but millions of moderate Muslims too. As a result, the party was thoroughly thrashed at the elections: PAS won only one parliamentary seat in Kelantan – Pengkalan Chepa, then held by Ustaz Nik Abdullah Arshad (also known as Pak Nik Lah). PAS's share of the vote was 15.3% and its share of parliamentary seats dropped to 0.6%, its lowest ever. In Trengganu, PAS suffered badly too, winning only two state assembly seats – Rhu Rendang and Wakaf Mempelam, that were held by Ustaz Abdul Hadi Awang and Haji Mustafa Ali.

Also as an indirect result of the radicalisation of PAS, the non-Malay votes swung to the Malaysian-Chinese opposition party DAP. The DAP won more parliamentary seats than PAS – 24 parliamentary seats (13.6% of total seats), which was its biggest win then. PAS had been taught the painful lesson that fiery Islamist polemics is not everyone's cup of tea, and that for non-Muslims in particular, it left a bitter aftertaste that led to protest votes instead.

Left with little to do but to count their losses and lick their wounds, the leaders and members of PAS returned to the drawing board. Yusof Rawa did not relent in his struggle to reform and upgrade his party and in February 1987 PAS received the permit for the party's new party newspaper,

49 Hadi Awang's statement was made on 11 February 1985 at a special symposium on Islam and national unity organised by PAS at the Chinese Assembly Hall in Kuala Lumpur. The meeting was meant to attract potential Chinese voters to PAS's cause, but the symposium was badly reported in the mainstream vernacular Malay press. In another dialogue session held in Kuala Terengganu, Hadi Awang claimed that the Islamist party did not set out to defend or promote the special rights of the Malays, which for him was an un-Islamic concept (Khoo Boo Teik, *Paradoxes of Mahathirism*, p. 226).

Harakah.[50] In the same year (1987) Yusof Rawa introduced another major change to the party's organisational structure – the *Majlis Syura Ulama* (Ulama Consultative Council) and the office of the *Murshid'ul Am* (spiritual guide/leader) of the party. [51] By then, the ulama takeover of PAS was complete; with the raising of the status of the ulama, the formation of the Ulama Consultative Council and the introduction of the post of *Murshid'ul Am*, the ulama were in all the key leadership posts of the party. PAS may have been soundly beaten at the elections of 1986, but the party's internal structure was stronger than ever.

Ironically, PAS's defeat at the elections of 1986 – catastrophic though it was – gave the party the time to reform and redefine itself. In the meantime, PAS's adversaries in UMNO were preoccupied with their own internal leadership crisis that led to the split within the UMNO party in the same year (1987). While Dr. Mahathir faced an internal leadership challenge from other leaders of UMNO, the ranks of the *Barisan Nasional* were also beginning to falter as the MCA began to make more and more demands on UMNO, leading to a crisis within the BN as well. All of this culminated in the crisis of 1987, which led to the security round-up known as *Operation Lalang*.

Codenamed '*Ops Lalang*',[52] the security operation that began on 27 October 1987 led to the arrest and detention of 119 people under the ISA. The day after the launch of *Ops Lalang*, several mainstream newspapers were also shut down. These included English-language papers *The Star* and *The Sunday Star*, Chinese-language daily *Sin Chew Jit Poh* and Malay-language biweekly *Watan*. *Harakah*, PAS's paper, was not banned – though some of its printers initially

50 The *Harakah's* first editor was Mohamad Yusof Jalil; other staff members included Abu Bakar Rashid, Mashudi Abdullah and Lokman Ahmad. In the following years, *Harakah* attracted a number of other articulate and influential Malay writers such as Hussein Yaakub, Ahmad Lutfi Othman and Subky Abdul Latif, and it became the party's main organ of communication and propaganda. Among the conditions imposed were that copies of *Harakah* had to be sold separately from other mainstream newspapers and magazines and could only be sold to PAS members. *Harakah* was also not allowed to include advertisements. Hussein Yaakub notes that when the circulation of the paper was around 60,000-70,000, the authorities paid no heed to it. However, as soon as sales rose above 80,000, they began to monitor sales (Hussein Yaakub, *UMNO Tidak Relevan*, p. 218).

51 When the idea of the Majlis Syura Ulama was first raised, the Registrar of Societies refused to accept it on the grounds that it was fundamentally undemocratic. The Registrar noted that in the original framework of the *majlis* all its members were appointed, rather than elected by party members. Yusof Rawa then redesigned the *majlis* so that at least two-thirds of its members were elected. In the end, four members were elected by the executive committee, four by the Dewan Ulama and four more by these eight members of the *majlis*, bringing the total to twelve. (Interview with Mohd Hatta Ramli, 21 January 2002.)

52 *Lalang* is a common field grass widely regarded by farmers as a nuisance.

refused to print the paper for fear of the consequences. As well as several MCA and UMNO members (including Ibrahim Ali, Tajuddin Abdul Rahman and Fahmi Ibrahim), many other non-BN political activists, academics and NGO workers were detained in the operation. These included DAP leaders Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh, PSRM leaders, a number of Christian evangelists, environmentalists from the Malaysian Friends of the Earth (SAM), activists from the Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) and Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, a Malaysian academic and president of Aliran, a human rights NGO.[53] PAS was not spared, either – a number of its leaders and activists were also arrested.

PAS was then accused for fanning religious hatred and violent communitarian politics, thanks to the speeches by some of its leaders like Mat Sabu who had warned of the dangers of 'underground Christian missionaries' operating in the country, and who were alleged to be engaged in a clandestine conversion campaign. At the same time other PAS leaders like Zainuddin Abdullah and Omar Khalid were accused of being part of an underground militant organisation.[54] While it was true that PAS leaders were actively campaigning against Christian missionary organisations and openly attacking the Malaysian government for allowing such groups to operate in the country, Jomo has argued that:

> (The members of PAS) detained in 1987 were quite marginal to that quickly-aborted (anti-Christian) campaign. Instead, the PAS detainees in Kamunting included some of PAS's more effective activists, some of whom were beginning to articulate a more radical Islamic social programme and initiate dialogues with non-Muslims. Their detention suggests an effort to pre-empt such potentially significant PAS initiatives.[55]

In the government's white paper entitled 'Towards Preserving National Security' that was issued later in 1988, the federal government justified the October 1987 crackdown on the grounds that the country was about to be torn apart by extremist movements exploiting racial and religious issues. The paper claimed that a number of PAS members had formed an underground militant organisation called *Tentera Allah* or *Jundullah*

53 Of the 119 people arrested and detained, 49 were finally sent to Kamunting detention centre, 70 were released within the 60-day investigation period (when technically under police investigation, but not detained under the ISA). The rest were released under restriction orders and banished from their previous place of residence.

54 Al-Afghani, *Operasi Kenari*, p. 125.

55 Jomo, 'Race, Religion and Repression', pp. 9-10.

(Army of Allah) in Kelantan on 29 August 1987. The organisation was said to be ready and willing to confront the government and was prepared to resort to the use of violence. Two of the PAS leaders detained – Zainuddin Abdullah and Omar Khalid – were accused of being part of this militant organisation, and once again PAS found itself burdened with the label of being an extremist fundamentalist party preaching revolutionary Islam.

As if that was not enough, PAS found itself caught in the sights of the state security apparatus yet again in October 1988, during another security operation called *Ops Kenari.* Between 14 October and 10 November 1988, the state's security forces apprehended 31 PAS members and supporters in Kedah and Perak. Six pistols, three hand grenades, various explosive devices and ammunition were found.[56] Among those arrested and later detained under the ISA were Mohammad Rus Jaafar, Shahrul Fuadi Zulkifli, Shamsul Bahrin Shaari and Shamsul Kamal Jamhari, all prominent PAS activists and members of the party's youth division. Those accused and detained were described as '*mujahideen*' militants planning to start a campaign of 'holy terror' in the state.[57] In the same way that in the past other PAS leaders had been linked to shadowy Islamist militant and terrorist organisations – such as *Pertubuhan Angkatan Sabillullah* and the *Jundullah* movement – PAS members were again being cast as Islamic terrorists and militants who were a threat to national security and racial harmony.

Notwithstanding the hammering that they were receiving in the local and regional media, PAS's leaders refused to relent. Yusof Rawa, Nik Aziz, Hadi Awang and the other leaders of PAS maintained their oppositional stance against the BN UMNO-led government, and argued that the government's lax national security policy had exposed Malaysian society to the activities of covert anti-Islamic groupings, including Zionist agents, Christian missionaries and communist infiltrators. By then, however, PAS had transformed itself into an Islamist party that saw itself as part of a global Islamist movement that was revolutionary and counter-hegemonic in its ambitions. In their speeches, the leaders of PAS had placed PAS on the map of the contemporary Islamic world and identified PAS with other Islamist movements like the *Jama'at-e Islami, Ikhwan'ul Muslimin* and *Hizbul Rifah* that were actively pursuing the goal of an Islamic state elsewhere. To bolster its international standing further, in 1988 PAS organised its *Ijtimak Antarabangsa Perpaduan Ummah* (International Conference on Muslim Unity), inviting representatives from other Islamist movements in Thailand,

56 Ibid., p. 95.

57 Al-Afghani, p. 125.

Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. What began as a local political struggle between two Malay-Muslim parties had been elevated to the stage of global politics. The Islamist party that was completely unknown in the 1950s was now ranked as one of the best known in the region. PAS could not claim that it had succeeded in capturing the state, but it could boast of a string of martyrs to its cause, and the deaths of young Malays like Fauzi Ismail and Abdul Aziz Samad in Afghanistan added to PAS's image as a party committed to the struggle of Islam and the jihad against its enemies.[58]

Yusof Rawa had succeeded in his aim of reinventing the Islamist party he had come to lead, and he delivered his final speech to his party at its 35th general assembly on 31 March 1989. He was, by then, ill and his speech was read by his deputy, Ustaz Fadzil Noor. In his speech, entitled *'Membina Ketahanan Ummah'* ('Developing the Strength of the Ummah'), Yusof Rawa spoke at length about the changes and developments that had taken place within the party and the country over the previous ten years. In his eulogy to the party he had come to lead, he summed up PAS's development thus:

> We love our party PAS not simply because it is called the Islamist Party of Malaysia, but we love it because it is the only movement that has brought together the biggest assembly of people who love Islam and the struggle of Islam; because it is the symbol of the strength of the *ummah* that is determined to realise the goal of upholding Islam in this country of ours. We love our party because it has shown that it is able, with God's help, to stand on its own in this country and to face all the calamities and persecution that has been meted out to it

58 Abdul Aziz Samad was a Malay youth from Selangor. His family were originally UMNO followers, but he became a supporter of the Islamist opposition. In 1988, he travelled to Afghanistan where he was killed fighting alongside the *mujahideen* forces (Al-Afghani, *Dagangnya Dibeli Allah*, p. 57). Fauzi Ismail was an ordinary member of PAS who travelled to Afghanistan to fight with the *mujahideen* during the Afghan War. Born on 1 September 1962 in Kampung Pantai Cicak, Kedah, Fauzi studied only up to the level of the Malaysian certificate of education (SPM). He did not receive any religious education, and was never enrolled at any local religious school or *madrasah*. Years later, he travelled to Singapore to work as a contract labourer. After returning to Kedah he opened a small sundry shop. He became a member of PAS and was soon elected as a member of the local committee of the PAS Youth Wing at Kampung Kelut. During the mid-1980s he involved himself in both PAS and ABIM educational activities, but soon withdrew from ABIM when he felt the movement was not doing enough for the promotion of Islam and an Islamic state in Malaysia (Ibid., p. 24). In 1988, he and a number of other PAS members left for Afghanistan to join the *mujahideen* in the war against the Soviet-backed forces of President Najibullah. Fauzi took part in the battles for Khost and Jalalabad. During the siege of Jalalabad he was killed when the trench he was guarding was hit by a shell fired from an enemy tank.

> from within and without. We love our party because it has, is, and God willing, will remain as the singular movement for the oppressed who strive for truth and justice and who will resist all forms of oppression and cruelty.[59]

Yusof Rawa's final speech summed up how PAS and its members saw themselves by then. PAS was no longer a movement united and galvanised by ethnocentric communitarian interests, but one that was part of a global struggle predicated on religious and moral terms. By then the leadership of PAS had also ground more homogenous in their outlook, and less inclined to entertain doubters in their midst. When PAS vice-president Ustaz Nakhaie Ahmad (formerly an ABIM member) announced that he intended to leave the party and join UMNO in 1989, PAS leaders remained unruffled.[60]

Ustaz Yusof Rawa resigned from his post as PAS president at the same *muktamar*. He chose to remain as the *Murshid'ul Am* of the party, but retired from active party politics. He settled at his home in Gelugor, Penang, and spent the rest of his years as one of the party's chief policy advisors until his death on 28 April 2000 at the age of 78. Yusof Rawa's son, Mujahid Yusof Rawa, later followed in his father's footsteps and was promoted to the central executive committee of the party's Youth Wing.[61] He also revived his father's publishing enterprise under the name Warathah Haji Yusof Rawa Sdn. Bhd.

In 1989, the same year that Ayatollah Khomeini passed away, the presidency of PAS was then passed on to Ustaz Fadzil Mohd Noor,[62] an ex-ABIM

59 Jaffar, 2000. pp. 258-259.

60 Yahaya Ismail, *Anwar Ibrahim: Antara Nawaitu dan Pesta Boria*, Kuala Lumpur: Dinamika Kreatif, 1993, p. 8.

61 Mujahid Yusof Rawa was born in Penang. Like his father, Mujahid was exposed to both secular and religious education systems. Many of Mujahid's years abroad were spent in the Middle East. He studied Arabic language and literature at Al-Azhar University in Egypt. After returning to Malaysia he studied human resources development at Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (UPM). He joined PAS and dedicated his life to Islamist activism and educational and training activities. He was later elevated to PAS information and public relations bureau in Melaka and was made a member of the central executive committee of the PAS Youth Wing.

62 Ustaz Fadzil Mohd Noor was born on 13 March 1937 in the village of Seberang Pumpung, near Alor Star, Kedah. He lost his parents while still very young, but he received extensive religious education due to his grandfather, Tuan Guru Haji Idris Al-Jarumi, a respected and well-known ulama from Patani, southern Thailand. From 1963-67 he studied *shariah* law at Al-Azhar University in Cairo on a Kedah state government scholarship. While at Al-Azhar, he was appointed deputy president of the Malay Students Association of Al-Azhar. Upon his return to Malaysia in 1967 he first taught at Maktab Mahmud and later at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

activist who had joined PAS in 1978 and had served as Yusof Rawa's right-hand man in the party throughout the 1980s. Years later, he credited Yusof Rawa for single-handedly moulding the Islamist party anew and bringing it 'back to the right track' along with other Islamist parties and movements that were part of the global resurgence of political Islam. As PAS braced itself for the next decade, news arrived of Iraqi tanks crossing the border into Kuwait, igniting the Gulf War. With the cry of *'Islam in danger!'* PAS girded its loins and continued in its struggle for the *daulah Islamiyyah* (Islamic rule).

On to the 1990s: PAS redefines its Jihad

If there was one lesson that PAS had learned during the 1980s, it was that confrontational rhetoric – no matter how popular it may appear – does not necessarily lead to electoral success. The party's disastrous performance at the 1986 elections had shown that the Malaysian public – including the Malay-Muslim majority – were unable and unwilling to tolerate a political party that was openly calling for revolutionary confrontation against the state. This left PAS in a dilemma of its own making, for the Islamist party could not abandon its call for an Islamic state, and could not jettison the concept of Jihad from its political struggle. But PAS had also undergone a change in its membership in the 1980s, with more and more Malay-Muslim students, activists and professionals joining its ranks. As the new decade dawned, a perceptible shift began to take place in the party: Yusof Rawa's stated ambition of turning PAS into a party that brought the ulama closer to the activist-intellectuals was about to bear fruit, with a new generation of technocratic and professionally inclined Islamists coming to the fore to define the party's struggle and political objectives.

(UTM)'s Faculty of Islamic Studies until 1978. By then Fadzil had already become a member of PAS and risen to the post of executive committee member in Kedah and head of the information bureau in the state. Fadzil also became a member of ABIM and the Malaysian Association of Ulama (PUM). In 1973-74, he served as the secretary of ABIM's information bureau and he took part in the student protests in support of the farmers in Baling. When ABIM president Anwar Ibrahim was detained, Fadzil Noor took over as president from 1974-78. In 1974, he was also elected as secretary-general of PUM. In 1983, he was elected as deputy president of PAS when Ustaz Yusof Rawa was elected president. In 1989, he was elected as president of PAS after Ustaz Yusof Rawa was forced to retire due to ill-health. He passed away in October 2002 and was replaced by Tuan Guru Hadi Awang who became the sixth president of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party.

The First Gulf War provided PAS with the opportunity to play to the gallery and condemned the invasion of Iraq as part of an elaborate plot to destroy Muslims worldwide. The Malaysian government, however, was caught at a diplomatic impasse for Malaysia was then a member of the United Nations Security Council, and the Prime Minister had condemned Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as an attack on the sovereignty of another country.[63] PAS took the opportunity to assume the moral high ground and criticised the government for caving in to Western pressure. To emphasise its difference even further, some PAS leaders chose to unilaterally engage with the Iraqis in an effort to broker an early peaceful settlement. Hadi Awang was invited by the Turkish leader of the Refah party, Necmettin Erbakan, that went to Iraq and met Saddam Hussein. (In the same year, the popular PAS leader was appointed to the *Majmak Takrik Mazhab Islami* based in Tehran, Iran.) The Gulf War had thus furnished PAS with an international platform to make themselves known in the Muslim world, while also allowing them to condemn the stand taken by their own government.

By then, the barbed accusations from PAS were beginning to sting their adversaries; the capital-driven developmental model of the state was condemned on both moral and economic grounds by PAS's leaders, who were by then being advised by a growing number of young Islamist economists and professionals in their midst. PAS's new generation of Islamist-technocrats noted that after 20 years of such development, the shift towards manufacturing and heavy industries had been profound (manufacturing's share of total exports had risen from a mere 11.1% in 1970 to a huge 58.8% by 1990), but this had also resulted in mass migration from the countryside to the industrial zones on the west coast of the peninsula. With that came the steady depopulation of the Malay countryside and a corresponding drop in agricultural production.[64] By the late 1980s, most poor households in the country were still Malay (81.7% in 1987) and overwhelmingly rural (82.7% in 1990). However, the real thrust of the PAS attack came when the leaders accused the UMNO-led government of its 'moral neglect' of the people

63 Shanti Nair notes that 'in defending Malaysia's stand at the UMNO general assembly in December 1990, Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir stressed that when a country faced external aggression the identity of those extending aid (i.e. the non-Muslim Western powers) was less significant than the aggression itself. Drawing an analogy to Malaysia's situation during the crisis of the *Konfrontasi* with Indonesia, he pointed out the fact that at that time Malaysia needed all the help it could get from the international community.' (Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, p. 246).

64 Shireen Mardziah Hashim, *Income Inequality and Poverty in Malaysia*, Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998, p. 219.

since the 1980s. PAS condemned the government's promotion of what it regarded as 'sinful' and 'decadent' forms of economic and socio-cultural activity, particularly in areas such as gambling, tobacco and alcohol, popular media and tourism. It reviled the numerous investment schemes of the government – such as the *Amanah Saham Nasional* (ASN, National Savings Trust) – as state-sponsored forms of gambling that were *haram* (forbidden). And the leaders of PAS did not hesitate to criticise Anwar Ibrahim as well, who was once counted among the ranks of the Islamists themselves and who had once said that 'any attempt to uphold Islam within the framework of an economy that practised usury, legalised the sale of alcohol and gambling would be an insult to the religion'.[65]

The revitalised PAS of the early 1990s began to offer its own view of how the country's economy should be run, and in 1990 published its own economic blueprint entitled *'Falsafah dan Strategi Ekonomi Negara selapas Tahun 1990'* ('National Economic Philosophy and Strategy after 1990').[66] The document began with an outright rejection of the economic and developmental philosophy that had been championed by UMNO and the ruling coalition. PAS's outright rejection of capitalism seemed more in keeping with the leftist-Islamist rhetoric of Dr. Burhanuddin al-Helmy in the 1960s than the ethnocentric nationalism of Asri Muda of the 1970s. A telltale sign of how PAS had shifted from its earlier confrontational stance to a more pragmatic one was its new slogan. Gone were the inflammatory references to bloody struggle and martyrdom – the new slogan it adopted for the elections of 1990 was '*Membangun bersama Islam*' ('Developing with Islam') instead.

The 1990 general elections proved to be a turning point that surprised many, including members of PAS themselves. PAS was still unable to form a working coalition with the non-Muslim parties of the land, but its allies in 1990 were the Malay-Muslim parties Semangat '46 (that had broken away from UMNO in 1987), HAMIM (formed by ex-PAS president Asri Muda) and BERJASA (founded by ex-chief minister of Kelantan, Mohamad Nasir). These parties came together under the umbrella of a new coalition called the *Angkatan Perpaduan Ummah* (United Ummah Front). It was not certain if PAS was able to make any real gains then, for the memory of the 1986 defeat was still in the minds of many. Furthermore, the state's development record at the time was very good, and the country was well out of the recession by

65 Anwar Ibrahim, Speech quoted in *Panji Masyarakat*, October 1980.

66 Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), 'Falsafah dan Strategi Ekonomi Negara selepas 1990: Pandangan dan Saranan. Pasti Islam Se-Malaysia', official document circulated by PAS party leadership, 1990.

then: In the previous three years Malaysia had enjoyed near double-digit growth, and Malay direct equity ownership in the country's economy had reached 19.2%.[67]

In the event, PAS had staged a significant comeback. PAS won seven parliamentary seats (six in Kelantan and one in Terengganu), while Semangat '46 won eight seats.[68] Together with its coalition partners, PAS had swept Kelantan in toto, wiping out all traces of UMNO. They won all 39 state assembly seats and all of Kelantan's 12 parliamentary seats. Tuan Guru Nik Aziz had urged the people to go out and vote in the election, and to use their votes as part of the *jihad* to topple the UMNO-led government that had gone beyond the pale of Islam.[69] The ulama had also urged the people to perform special prayers (*sembahyang hajat*) and read the *do'a qunut nazilah* (a prayer of supplication) in their rallies to guarantee success.[70] After losing Kelantan to the BN during the Asri years, PAS had regained the state that was the jewel in its crown.

Apart from PAS, two other parties also made some gains at the elections of 1990: the DAP's share of parliamentary seats had dropped to 20, but it had made inroads into constituencies controlled by the MCA and Gerakan, UMNO's allies in the BN. In the East Malaysian state of Sabah, the rise of Kadazandusun ethnic-based politics contributed to the victory of the *Parti Bersatu Sabah* (PBS), that won 14 seats. But it was in Kelantan that the opposition's victory would yield the most tangible results; the ulama and activist-intellectuals of PAS had finally secured a state of their own, where their experiment with Islamist governance and social engineering could be put to work. Needless to say, after being out of power for so long, the Islamists did not tarry.

PAS began the process of restructuring Kelantan immediately. The ban on gambling in the state took effect on 1 January 1991. At the same time, the state government began drafting the *hudud* ordinances for Kelantan. The ban on all public events that allowed men and women to mix together extended even to religious events such as the *Qur'an* reading competition and the performance of *nasyid* (religious songs) by women-only groups. Nik Aziz's justification was that 'even the voice of a woman could be regarded as part of her *aurat* (modesty), and thus it could distract men from their

67 Re: Khoo Boo Teik, 1995, pp. 324-325.

68 Shortly after the election, a S46 member of parliament defected and joined UMNO, reducing S46's representation in Parliament from eight to seven.

69 Jamal Mohd Lokman, *Biografi Tuan Guru Dato' Haji Nik Abdul Aziz*, p. 109.

70 Ibid., p. 110.

religious duties'.[71] From the moment he took over as chief minister, Tuan Guru Nik Aziz informed members of the State Assembly that he would be introducing a new form of ulama leadership and management, governing according to the principle of *musyawarah* (consultation). To clear up any unwanted confusion about the difference between *musyawarah* and democracy, Nik Aziz explained what *he* meant by *musyawarah* thus:

> What is meant by the term *mesyuwarah* here is *mesyuwarah* (consultation) on matters that have no ruling (*nas*) on them, whether in the *Qur'an* or the *Hadith*. It follows that on all other matters that have already been ruled and decided upon (in the *Qur'an* or the *Hadith*), there is no further need for *mesyuwarah*. What is required in these cases is the immediate implementation of what has been ruled upon, with no hesitation or procrastination.[72]

For the upper-middle class Westernised liberal elites of Kuala Lumpur, such talk was greeted with horror. Notwithstanding the entry of a new generation of highly educated professionals into PAS, it seemed as if the PAS-led state government of Kelantan had fallen into the hands of a conservative leader who bore more similarities to the Ayatollahs of revolutionary Iran. But PAS's critics then (and now) failed to note that PAS was (and remains) a complex party, with several streams of Islamic thought and praxis running in its veins. Nik Aziz and the ulama of PAS were undoubtedly happy that their Islamist party was now home to a new generation of modern Muslim professionals and activists, but they were also ulama, whose task it was to defend the integrity of Muslim orthodoxy and to protect Islam from elements that they considered contaminating and alien to the religion.

A little should be said about Nik Aziz at this stage, for he would dominate PAS's politics for the next two decades up to the 2010s. It was a little known fact that Nik Aziz was a descendant of one of the oldest royal families of Southeast Asia, with a genealogy that goes back to the ancient kings of Langkasuka.[73] In 1952, he travelled to India to study at Dar'ul 'Ulum Deoband seminary, otherwise known as the Deobandi College that was established in 1867, when the leadership of the Indian Muslim community was in the

71 Jamal Mohd Lokman, *Biografi Tuan Guru Dato' Haji Nik Abdul Aziz*, p. 118; pp. 139-140.

72 Ibid., p. 153.

73 Jamal notes that while Nik Aziz came from a long line of royalty and nobles, the family's fortunes had declined over the years. His grandfather, Raja Banjar, was a modest agriculturalist who owned farming land in Kelantan and opened up several plantations there. Nik Mat Alim was a student of Tok Kenali and Tuan Guru Haji Musa bin Abdul Samad (Ibid., p. 9).

hands of the ulama and the Ashraf élite.[74] The Deoband seminary was, by then, one of the best-known *madrasahs* in the Muslim world and had produced thousands of young conservative ulama who had been trained to internalise and reproduce the corpus of Islamic teaching dating to the time of the Prophet. Deoband was also an institution that taught that the ulama had a pivotal role to play in society, as the leaders of the Muslim flock and as the model for Muslim normative behaviour.

After completing his studies at Deoband in 1957, Nik Aziz travelled to Lahore, Pakistan to study *tafsir* (exegesis of the *Qur'an*). He then travelled to Egypt where he was impressed by the progress and development that he saw around him.[75] There he studied at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, where he first read Arabic and then Islamic law and jurisprudence (*fiqh*). In Cairo, he also became acquainted with the work of other famous Islamist thinkers such as Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb and movements such as the *Ikhwan'ul Muslimin*.[76] (Another PAS leader who had established close contacts with the *Ikhwan* while studying in Egypt was Tuan Guru Hadi Awang.) Nik Aziz graduated with a degree in law in 1962, after studying abroad for 12 years.

By the time he returned to Malaysia in 1962, Nik Aziz had already been exposed to Islamist movements in India, Egypt and other parts of the Muslim world. He joined PAS soon after, and during the Asri years was one of the PAS leaders who had been given a post in the BN-government's state religious bureaucracy. But as we have seen earlier, the Asri years ended badly and by 1982 Nik Aziz and the other members of the ulama faction had come to the simple conclusion that if Malaysia was to become an Islamic state then it was up to the Islamists to do it themselves. Within PAS, Nik Aziz's reputation as the '*tuan guru*' (respected teacher) grew rapidly. By the 1980s, his position within the party's Dewan Ulama ensured that he was in the right place to offer comments and criticisms on the conduct of party leaders and members. After he took command of the Dewan Ulama, Nik Aziz sought to build up its importance as the party's 'inner chamber' of consultation and

74 For more on the Dar'ul Ulum Deoband see: Barbara D. Metcalf, *Islamic Revival in British India: Deoband 1860-1900*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982 and *Traditionalist Islamic Activism: Deoband, Tablighis and Talibs*, ISIM Papers IV, Leiden: International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World (ISIM), 2002; Kenneth W. Jones, 'Socio-Religious Reform Movements in British India', in *The New Cambridge History of India*, III(1). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 48-60.

75 Jamal Mohd Lokman, *Biografi Tuan Guru Dato' Haji Nik Abdul Aziz*, p. 16.

76 Ibid., p. 55.

arbitration.[77] Together with party president Haji Yusof Rawa, he sought to strengthen the credibility and influence of the ulama leadership of the party through the Dewan that continued to issue judgements sanctioning the policies of the political leaders of the party. Following the party's worst-ever performance at the elections of 1986, he was given the authority to make whatever changes he felt were necessary to bring the party back into line with its Islamist orientation. Nik Aziz then initiated a series of reforms and purges aimed at eliminating once and for all the vestiges of the Asri era.

It was this drive towards ideological and religious purity that prompted men like Nik Aziz, Yusof Rawa and their *ulama* counterparts to reform their party, and in time the state government of Kelantan as well. Their steadfast refusal to compromise on issues such as *shariah* law and *hudud* punishments meant that they were heading towards another confrontation with the state and their critics in the public domain. But it ought to be noted that by this stage of PAS's development (in the 1990s) its commitment to political Islam had overridden other considerations for popularity or having to appease their liberal critics.

On 25 November 1993, the Kelantan Shariah Criminal Code (II) bill was passed by all 36 members of the Kelantan State Assembly. (It is interesting to note that the UMNO members of the Assembly did not oppose it too.) The bill was formulated by a drafting committee comprising PAS leaders and its most prominent ulama and chaired by Ustaz Abdul Hadi Awang. In order to pre-empt any criticism of the bill, Hadi Awang had earlier issued a warning that the bill proposed by PAS was *essentially* Islamic and that *any* Muslim who resisted its introduction was committing apostasy (*murtad*). He further added that such apostates were outside the boundaries of the Muslim *ummah* and that the punishment for apostasy was death. The bill outlined a number of *hudud* offences that would be punished according to Islamic law. Part I of the bill listed the following offences: *sariqah* (theft), *hirabah* (robbery), *zina* (unlawful sexual intercourse), *qazaf* (wrongful accusation of *zina*), *al-li'an* (wrongful accusation of *zina* by a husband against his wife), *liwat* ('unnatural sex' involving anal intercourse, i.e. sodomy), *musahaqah* ('unnatural sex' between women), *ittiyan almaitah* (necrophilia), *ittiyan albahimah* (bestiality), *syurb* (intoxication or consumption of liquor) and *irtidad* or *riddah* (apostasy). The bill also included provisions for *qisas* (revenge killing) and *diyat* (blood money) in crimes of murder or homicide.[78]

77 Ibid., p. 97.

78 For a full transcript of the Kelantan Shariah Code (II) bill see Rose Ismail (ed.), *Hudud in Malaysia: The Issues at Stake*, Kuala Lumpur: Sisters in Islam (SIS) Forum, 1995.

Critics of the Kelantan *shariah* bill denounced it as backward, ill-conceived and discriminatory. It was argued that the bill was 'an anachronistic attempt to impose in modern times and upon modern Muslims of good faith what is not the essence or culmination of Islamic law, but only Islamic law in its most archaic, provisional and historically unevolved form'.[79] Many opponents of the bill also argued that it contained fundamental contradictions and loopholes that effectively discriminated against women and religious minorities. Malaysian feminist groups attacked the bill for the way that it effectively marginalised the role of women and non-Muslims in the legal process and reduced the status of women and non-Muslims to a secondary level. The disqualification of women as eyewitnesses, the downgrading of the value of a woman's testimony in court and the implied view that the life of a woman was worth half of a man's were cited as blatant proof, if any was needed, of the patriarchal and chauvinistic agenda behind PAS's Islamisation policy and its *hudud* laws.[80]

The Malaysian government also responded in no uncertain terms. Speaking on the issue of Islamic law and its application in modern Muslim societies, Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, argued that:

> PAS's [interpretation of] *Hudud* law is the result of the understanding, or *fiqh,* and interpretations of the *Qur'an* and *Shariah* by PAS people themselves, besides being in the interest of a political party. It does not become part of the teachings of Islam that must be accepted by all Muslims. Neither does it come under the teachings of Islam that resulted from the understanding and interpretations of Imams who are recognised by the Sunnis or Shias … Hence, PAS cannot claim that its [interpretation of the] law is accurate and part of Islamic teachings. Even the validity of PAS law cannot be ascertained. They may be judged against the teachings of Islam.[81]

On 15 May 1994, the government announced that it would not accept PAS's demand to impose *hudud* law in Kelantan. This did not dampen the spirit of PAS's leaders, but only gave them yet another reason to accuse the BN-led Federal government of not being committed to the Islamic cause.

79 Noraini Othman, 'Hudud Law or Islamic Modernity?', in Noraini Othman (ed.), *Shariah and the Modern Nation-State: A Malaysian Symposium.* Kuala Lumpur: Sisters in Islam (SIS) Forum, 1994, p. 149.

80 Rose Ismail, *Hudud in Malaysia*, 1995.

81 Mahathir Mohamad, 'Islam Guarantees Justice for all Citizens', paper presented at the Arab Language Centre in Nilam Puri, Kelantan, 3 March 1994 (Ibid., p. 65).

Though the latte and chardonnay-imbibing metropolitan liberals of Kuala Lumpur may have bemoaned the rise of ulama like Nik Aziz and his calls for *hudud* punishments, the man's popularity among the members of PAS grew even stronger. PAS's critics at the time (which included liberal activists, Western-educated elites and urban-based feminist groups) were perhaps unimpressed by Nik Aziz's pedigree and orthodox Islamic credentials, but they failed to understand that this was the very reason why he (and the other senior ulama of PAS) were deemed attractive by the younger generation of PAS technocrats and activists, too. While men like Yusof Rawa (then *Murshid'ul Am* of PAS) and Nik Aziz (as Chief Minister of Kelantan) laid down the broad macro parameters for what a moral and spiritual state ought to look like, the younger generation of PAS professionals set about the task of micro-management on a state government level. It was, in fact, a symbiotic relationship between the ulama and the professionals where both mutually depended on each other; the ulama needed the younger professionals to go about the task of state building and society management, while the professionals needed the ulama to provide them the fixed moral guidelines within which they would be able to work. The appeal of the Nik Aziz, Yusof Rawa and the ulama lay in the fact that these were scholars schooled in proper, correct Muslim moral orthodoxy whose value systems were unchanging, not relative and universal. It was a static moral-political discourse that had the advantage of historical patina to it, and was something that no other party could offer then.

The Ground Shifts, Again: The Narrowing of the Muslim Political Arena from the Mid-1990s to 1999

As PAS settled into its own comfortable niche in the state of Kelantan, other developments external to the party were taking place that were independent of PAS itself. In time, these developments would actually work out in PAS's favour, and the two most significant developments from the mid-1990s to 1999 were the crackdown on the *Darul Arqam* movement, and the internal crisis within UMNO.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, PAS has been forced to compete for the hearts and minds of Muslims in a Muslim-majority country where the discursive arena of Islam was already overpopulated by a host of different, competing groups. Apart from PAS and UMNO – both of which happened to be Muslim parties claiming to be the defenders of Islam – there were also other groups such as the neo-revivalist *Darul Arqam,* the lay missionaries

of the *Tablighi Jama'at,* the activists of ABIM and JIM, a range of local Sufi brotherhoods and a number of Muslim NGOs. While some of these movements such as the *Tabligh* did not pose a political challenge to PAS (due to the *Tabligh*'s apolitical nature), others like the *Darul Arqam* did.[82]

Since the late 1960s the *Darul Arqam* movement had grown more popular and its leaders seemed to behave in a manner that betrayed their own political ambitions. The movement's neo-Sufi mystic Ustaz Ashaari Muhammad (known to his followers as '*abuya*' (father)) had asserted on several occasions that he was precisely the sort of man gifted enough to lead Muslim Malaysia to its appointment with destiny. He had courted controversy when, on television, he had condemned the 'craven Muslim leaders' who had lent their support to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 1990. (He had also predicted that America would have been defeated by the forces of Saddam Hussein.) *Arqam* had, by then, created a 'shadow government' of its own with various 'departments' that were meant to mirror the various ministries of the Malaysian government. Its financial empire had also grown worldwide, with branches established as far as Uzbekistan.[83] But by publicly criticising the Malaysian government in the media and in its own publications, *Darul Arqam* was courting disaster for itself. The showdown came soon enough, in September 1994.

The crackdown on *Darul Arqam* in late 1994 proved that the Malaysian state was in full functioning order and that its security apparatus was still able to deliver spectacular results. In less than two months, Malaysian state security forces had worked closely with their counterparts in Indonesia, Thailand and Singapore and had managed to round up all of the movement's leaders. Ashaari himself was apprehended in Thailand and soon repatriated back to Malaysia to be interrogated and detained. The crackdown also demonstrated the extent to which the Malaysian security forces were, by then, integrated with the state's religious machinery. *Arqam* was accused of being linked to a clandestine militant grouping called *Asykar Badr*, a force

82 For a comparative account of the similarities and differences between *Darul Arqam* and *Tablighi Jama'at*, see Muhammad Khalid Masud (ed.), *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablighi Jama'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal*, Leiden: Brill, 2000, p. lvii.

83 *Arqam* had, by 1994, become one of the richest and best organised Islamist organisations in the country. It boasted of having 10,000 members and at least 100,000 other sympathisers in Malaysia alone. *Arqam's* business assets were estimated to be worth around RM300 million (US$116 million); it had 417 companies and businesses officially listed as part of its concern. The movement also had 257 schools in Malaysia and its own university in Indonesia. Its network of *madrasah*, schools and *dakwah* centres stretched across the ASEAN region and went as far as Uzbekistan and the Central Asian states.

of more than 300 militia troops based somewhere in southern Thailand (though in the end, the state prosecutors could not prove any direct link between the two). And *Arqam* members were also accused of being involved in militant activities abroad. (In 1994 the Egyptian government arrested 19 *Arqam* members – all female students – for their association with Islamist militant cells in the country.[84]) The Council of Muftis and Ulama issued a *fatwa* against the teachings of Ustaz Ashaari who, they claimed, was a danger to Islam per se and Muslims in general, and argued that he had deliberately misled his followers with false and deviationist teachings (*ajaran sesat*). *Arqam* was thus summarily neutralised and discredited both as a security threat to the state and as a deviationist movement that was corrupting Islam and Muslims.

That the *Darul Arqam* movement was a nuisance to the Malaysian government was obvious, but it was also a potential competitor for PAS. PAS, however did not have the means to negate the influence and popularity of *Arqam* for it did not have access to federal state power, or command of the state security apparatus. Ironically by removing *Arqam* from the political scene the BN-led government was also doing PAS a favour, for it had eliminated a threat that PAS was unable to fend off on its own. Smirking quietly as the drama unfolded, PAS counted its blessings as it prepared for the general elections of 1995…

For the elections of 1995, PAS once again returned to its favourite theme which was the Islamisation of Malaysian society. Once again, it also co-operated with its Muslim allied parties such as *Semangat '46*. But by then a perceptible change had taken place in terms of its discourse and the rhetoric it employed: PAS was no longer a party out in the wilderness, for it had regained control of Kelantan, and was able to demonstrate in no uncertain terms what it meant by its brand of Islamist governance. In contrast to the BN government's developmental model (which it continued to criticise as capitalist, materialist and immoral) it promoted its own brand of moral-spiritual governance instead. But the violent rhetoric of the 1980s was no longer there.

PAS's adversaries in UMNO, on the other hand, were also keen to play the Islamic card and spoke of the many Islamic projects that had been undertaken – the latest of which was the formation of the International

84 Anthony T. H. Tan, 'The Rise of Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia: An Emerging Security Challenge', *Panorama*, No. 1/2001, Manila: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2001, p. 86.

Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation[85] (ISTAC) under the leadership of influential Islamist thinker Prof. Syed Naquib al-Attas, in 1991.[86] Malaysia, along with several other OIC countries like Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Palestine, had sent a total of 20,000 troops to serve in Bosnia as part of the international peacekeeping force since 1992 and this was presented as proof of the UMNO/BN government's commitment to Muslim causes worldwide. Prior to the election campaign the UMNO-linked media accused PAS of sowing the seeds of discord and disunity among the Muslims of Malaysia. PAS leaders did not take this lightly, and responded in a rather nasty way by claiming that Prime Minister Mahathir had not read the *Qur'an* properly and that he could not even speak Arabic. PAS was not moved by UMNO's anti-Western, anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist polemics either. Instead, it maintained that the UMNO-led government had actually been trying to improve relations with Israel,[87] a point made public when the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* revealed that the Israeli envoy in Singapore had visited Malaysia for a number of unpublicised talks with senior government and business leaders.[88]

PAS was not deterred by the criticisms levelled against it, and the ulama leaders of the party chose to keep it on its appointed trajectory, directed as

85 ISTAC was officially opened in 1991. It was, from the very beginning, the brainchild of its founder-director, Syed Naquib al-Attas. Anwar Ibrahim, the ex-president of ABIM and now UMNO leader, was its first chairman. In its early years, ISTAC received much support and patronage from the Malaysian government, both financial assistance as well as publicity and endorsement of its activities.

86 Syed Naquib al-Attas is perhaps one of the most influential Islamist thinkers in Malaysia today. His influence extends well beyond the confines of academia and he has played an important role in the cultivation of the Islamic élite in the country. His early academic research was in the fields of Malay Sufism and literature. His fame was assured with the publication of his two-volume dissertation *The Mysticism of Hamzah Fansuri* (1965, published 1970). In 1994, he was awarded membership of the Royal Jordanian Academy and in 1995, an honorary doctorate by the University of Khartoum.

87 In 1994, Deputy Trade and International Industry Minister Chua Jui Ming had suggested that the Malaysian government might review its policy towards Israel in the light of improving relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours. He argued that as the Israeli government and the Palestinian authorities led by Yasser Arafat were on the way to normalising relations, Malaysia should lift its trade and political sanctions against Israel and allow Malaysian companies to invest in the country. The killing of the Israeli prime minister in 1995 effectively ended the attempt to normalise relations between the two countries.

88 Nair, *Islam in Malaysian Foreign Policy*, p. 267, n. 17.

it was towards its goal of a new kind of moral-spiritual politics in Malaysia. In a speech delivered just before the election, the Nik Aziz said:

> While we continue in our political struggle, apart from fulfilling our obligation to care for the welfare of both religion and the here and now, *we need to think of our political activities as assets that can be used in the hereafter*. This is the basis of our political philosophy, which is very different from the struggle of the secular forces. They can only think of success in terms of material developments that stand before their very eyes. They regard material and worldly success as the only valid form of success that has any meaning or worth. For us who are struggling along the path of Islam, we are certain that the affairs of this world cannot be divorced from the concerns of the hereafter, and this also includes questions of politics and development. We will continue with our political struggle, but ours is a struggle that is also concerned about the hereafter. We will pursue the agenda of development, but ours will be a form of development that will not lead us to hell later (Emphasis mine).[89]

That Nik Aziz (then elevated to the post of the *Murshid'ul Am* of PAS) could speak of Islamist politics as an 'asset' that would be cashed in in the hereafter was itself a telling indication of how the language of PAS had changed since the earlier decade. Bit by bit a shift in PAS's semantics was seen, as the party adopted the vocabulary and symbols of the market economy in its bid to redefine the meaning of Jihad in the 1990s.

At the polls PAS contested 46 parliamentary seats and 178 state assembly seats, and managed to do rather well: It won seven and 33 seats, respectively. The BN coalition had won 167 parliamentary seats (84.3%) and obtained 3,862,694 votes in contrast to the 2,075,822 won by the combined opposition parties. The ruling coalition had gained 65.05% of the popular vote, an increase of 12% over the 53.4% it had received in the 1990 election. But PAS was not too disappointed with the results, for it had managed to retain control of Kelantan and proved that it was a force to be reckoned with. The other minor Islamist parties that stood by the wayside were effectively removed from the political scene for good: the *Angkatan Keadilan Insan Malaysia* (AKIM), originally a splinter group led by Cikgu Musa Salleh that

89 Nik Aziz Nik Mat, *'Politik sebagai Asset Akhirat'*, in Tarmizi Mohd Jam (ed.), *Kelantan Agenda Baru untuk Ummat Islam*, Kuala Lumpur: Rangkaian Minda Publishing, Chetak Khidmat, 1995, pp. 84-85.

broke away from PAS, failed miserably. HAMIM and BERJASA were likewise sidelined (neither party won a single seat) and even *Semangat '46* failed to secure any significant gains in its struggle to gain control of the Malay heartland. The DAP had likewise suffered a painful defeat as its share of parliamentary seats had dropped from 20 to 9. With the BN making a strong comeback, it is worth noting that the only opposition party that managed to win any substantial power in 1995 was PAS, with one state government in its pocket.

Soon after PAS was left to stand on its own again as a result of the demise of AKIM, HAMIM, BERJASA and *Semangat '46*. On 3 October 1996, *Semangat '46* that had been launched by Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah was officially disbanded. While the opposition parties of the country were left to bemoan their sorry lot, PAS was engaged in promoting the party abroad as part of an international network of Islamist parties and movements. As we have seen earlier, some of PAS's leaders such as Ustaz Hadi Awang were, by then, already known to other Islamist movements like the *Ikhwan'ul Muslimin* and *Jama'at-e Islami*. In 1994, Hadi was appointed to the executive committee of the International Islamic movement based in Istanbul, Turkey. He had also been involved in the International Islamic Secretariat for the Defense of Bait'ul Maqdis (Jerusalem) based in Jordan. He was later a member of the International Muslim delegation led by German Muslim leaders to settle disputes between the *mujahideen* factions in Afghanistan and a member of the delegation led by the Turkish Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan to the capitals of Europe. That PAS leaders were being invited to Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Indonesia and Turkey by the mid- to late-1990s was not surprising, considering that PAS was one of the first Islamist parties in the world to have come to power via constitutional means. The inward-looking days of the Asri era were at an end, and PAS was now seeking an international audience (and being sought by them too.)

At the party's annual general assemblies from the 1990s onward, observers from other Islamist parties from Egypt, Pakistan, Indonesia and Bangladesh were beginning to come. Such internationalism was not new, nor unique, to PAS as we have seen in the earlier chapters. By the 1990s, however, there were more and more radical Islamist groups in the region that were also extending their hand of friendship to their Islamist counterparts abroad, such as the *Jama'ah Ihya al-Sunnah* of Indonesia that was led by Jaafar Umar Thalib. The noteworthy difference however, was that these new movements were made up of the alumni of jihadi combatants who had met in the course of their jihadi campaigns in countries such as Afghanistan, which had spawned a vast international network of veteran *mujahideen* who would later return to

their home countries and revive their old networks once they were back. In time, groups like the *Laskar Jihad* and the *Lashkar-i Tayyeba* would appear in countries like Indonesia and Pakistan. Soon enough news began to filter to Southeast Asia of another group called the *Taliban*, who had managed to defeat the warring *mujahideen* factions in Afghanistan and to capture the capital of Kabul. The names of these new groups were beginning to circulate among Muslims in Malaysia and Indonesia then, though the full impact of their activities would only be felt in the coming decade.

While Islamist movements all over the world were stirring at the time, the ruling UMNO party in Malaysia was about to be struck by another internal leadership crisis, this time sparked off by the collapse of the currencies of Southeast Asia that began when Thailand decided to allow the value of the Thai Baht to float on the international currency market. By the late 1990s, the economies of Southeast Asia were already showing signs of overheating, thanks in part to indiscriminate credit expansion and the burgeoning of the commercial property market. By late 1997 the value of the Thai Baht, the Indonesian Rupiah and the Malaysian Ringgit had plummeted to unprecedented levels: The Rupiah had dropped in value by almost 80% in a matter of weeks, leading to massive capital flight, the collapse of the local banking sector and the rise of an urban-based student protest movement – led mostly by Muslim university students, many of whom were linked directly or indirectly to the Islamist opposition movements opposed to the rule of President Suharto. By November 1997 the call for *Reformasi* (political reform) was heard in all the major campuses of the country.

Malaysia was not spared the side effects of the economic crisis and, in time, differences of opinion over how to handle the East Asian economic crisis had appeared among the ranks of the UMNO/BN leadership, notably between Prime Minister Mahathir and Anwar Ibrahim, who was by then finance minister. The split between the two prominent leaders of UMNO marked yet another schism in UMNO's history, and it will be recalled that UMNO had experienced many a split in its history: The first major split led to the loss of the ulama wing of UMNO, which culminated in the emergence of PAS. Then in 1969-70 UMNO witnessed the fall of its leader and the rise of Tun Razak. In 1987 UMNO had split again, leading to the creation of Tengku Razaleigh's *Semangat '46*. It appeared as if the country's biggest Malay-Muslim ethnonationalist party was about to crack into two factions, as Malaysians worried about their fate and contemplated the fall of other leaders in the region, such as President Suharto, who had finally been forced to resign after 32 years of strongman rule. PAS bided its time, and again watched the drama within UMNO with keen interest and anticipation.

As the financial crisis worsened, the leaders of the UMNO-led government were divided over how to tackle it and to protect the Malaysian economy. Dr. Mahathir was soon confronted by his own deputy Anwar Ibrahim (also then finance minister) who employed the rhetoric of 'reform and transparency' popularised not only by the IMF but also the Indonesian reformist movement that had toppled the government of Suharto next door. Dr. Mahathir favoured a massive fiscal injection that would kick-start the economy by raising the level of domestic consumption, while Anwar favoured an austerity drive to slow down the already overheated economy. As the prospect for reconciliation grew dim, internal challenges appeared in the ranks of UMNO, notably during the party's General Assembly in June that year. Finally on 1 September 1998, Anwar Ibrahim was removed from the UMNO party and government, and capital controls were imposed the day after. Anwar's sacking from UMNO and the government led to one of the biggest protest movements in Malaysia, that utilised the same slogan of *reformasi* that had been the clarion call of the anti-Suharto movement in Indonesia as well. The level of tension rose and finally peaked when Anwar was arrested while being interviewed by the international media in his home, by the *Unit Tindakan Khas* (UTK).

In the fallout that ensued, the image and credibility of the Malaysian government suffered while the opposition parties quickly gathered to reap the benefits of the latest internal crisis within the UMNO and BN. The arrest of a number of prominent Islamist activists and intellectuals (mostly from ABIM) who were thought to be partisan to Anwar's cause only added fuel to the fire, and emboldened the Islamists who began to lend their support to the *reformasi* cause. In the heat of the moment, few cared to note the obvious: the leaders and members of PAS were now showing their sympathy to the same Anwar who they had accused of betraying the Islamist cause in the 1980s, and who they had accused of being the blue-eyed boy of an anti-Islamist government for almost two decades. This was also a time when political contestation had expanded to a new domain that had only just become available to all: the internet. As Gary Bunt (2000) has noted, Malaysia was then one of the few Muslim countries where ownership of personal computers was extensive and specific research had been undertaken related to Islamic applications of computer technology.[90] The confrontation against the state was soon taken to the

90 Gary R. Bunt, *Virtually Islamic: Computer-mediated Communication and Cyber Islamic Environments*, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000, p. 83.

realm of cyberspace, a terrain hitherto unpatrolled and unregulated by the State security apparatus.

It was then (1999) that PAS began its first foray into cyberspace, and soon enough its party newspaper *Harakah* would be the first party-political website in the country, bypassing the restrictions on its public sale and circulation. PAS took to the Internet faster than any other party at the time, thanks in part to the growing number of young, technologically savvy professionals who were now among its rank and file. After waiting so long to stage its comeback, PAS was now in a position to represent itself as a radical alternative to the UMNO-led ruling government. As noted by one of its leaders, Ustaz Haron Din:

> This political crisis was not planned by PAS. But now that it has happened, it is as if the whole country has been in a drought, and all the trees and plants have dried up. Even a small cigarette butt can ignite the whole country. The situation that Islam has waited for so long – waiting for the right moment to rise up – has arrived, and everywhere the people are looking for an Islamic solution.[91]

In the lead-up to the elections of 1999, PAS's organisational apparatus went into high gear and the party was busy with the task of rebranding itself as the new opposition party of the urban professional class. PAS leaders like Nik Aziz began to tour the major cities of the country, and were the guests of honour at the 'dine-talks' that PAS was now hosting in the plush five-star hotels in Kuala Lumpur. (Nik Aziz was the guest of honour at one of the first PAS 'dine-talks' at Nikko Hotel, Ampang, Kuala Lumpur then.[92]) The party was also being projected to the fore by the younger generation of activist-technocrats and professionals for the first time, led by the likes of Dzulkefly Ahmad, Hatta Ramli, the 'motivational expert' Dr. Hassan Ali, the party's youthful secretary general Nashruddin Mat Isa and ex-UMNO leader

91 Harun Din, speech at Jejawi, Perlis. Distributor: Al-Faizun Enterprise. Komplek Pasar Moden Gombak, 1999.

92 The author was present at this dinner. Practically all the guests were Malay-Muslims; many were PAS members. The relatively expensive cost of the dinner (RM100 per head) made it an exclusive and posh affair by PAS standards. Despite the media hype surrounding the event, Nik Aziz's dinner talk was not as impressive as many had expected. During the open dialogue that followed the dinner many of the questions directed to him were tame and uncontroversial. The author was given the chance to ask what PAS intended to do to reverse the privatisation of universities should PAS/ BA come to power. (This had been one of the party's election campaign promises.) Tuan Guru Nik Aziz flatly refused to answer the question outright, insisting that such matters would be dealt with only after PAS had been voted into government.

Dato' Kamaruddin Jaffar. During the months prior to the 1999 election, the professional leaders of PAS spoke about the need for economic structural reform, upholding the constitution, greater transparency and accountability in government. Charges of cronyism, nepotism and corruption (the paramount concerns of the *reformasi* movement) were brought to the fore and adopted by PAS as its new concerns. Specific policies of the Mahathir administration were also targeted, and among them was PAS's claim that, should it come to power, the party would immediately reverse the university privatisation programme that had been hugely unpopular with the students.

The changes to the party were not only structural, but sartorial as well: while the party leadership had opted for a more 'Islamic' look in the 1980s (abandoning the use of Western dress and mannerisms), the 'new look' PAS of 1999 was bedecked in coat and tie. (This prompted the Malaysian journalist M.G.G. Pillay to comment on the 'new PAS in the lounge suit and dinner jacket'.)[93]

While PAS's business suit brigade was busy wooing new voters and potential supporters in the urban areas, the party's senior ulama were occupied with the task of keeping the ranks in order and strengthening the party's hold on its traditional bases of power in the Malay heartland. There the ulama held the limelight, and their discourse was markedly different from that of the likes of Hassan Ali and Hatta Ramli. Ustaz Haji Harun Taib, head of the Dewan Ulama (Ulama Council) of PAS, for instance, was in no doubt whatsoever about the dominant role of the ulama should PAS come to power. Not having been schooled in the norms of political correctness, many senior PAS ulama seemed indifferent to the politically savvy and sensitive discourse of the more articulate party spokesmen operating in the urban constituencies. Comfortable that they were addressing the same Malay-Muslim constituencies they had been facing for decades, some ulama raised concerns that would not have gone down all that well among the more multiracial and multireligious audiences in the major cities, such as the threat of 'Christian subversives' in Malaysia, that had been one of PAS's bugbears for years.

That PAS leaders could speak of democracy, transparency and human rights and still uphold their struggle for an Islamic state on somewhat narrow terms seemed odd for some observers, but this was also an indication of how complex the party had grown over the years. Adding to the complexity was the need for PAS to forge – yet again – an instrumental coalition with the other parties of the country as the elections drew closer.

93 M.G.G. Pillay, 'The Islamic State Dons a Lounge Suit', Malaysiakini.com, 19 July 2001.

PAS was compelled to seek a working relationship with the DAP, a party it had not seen eye-to-eye on many an occasion in the past. DAP had made it clear that it would not support PAS's dream of creating an Islamic state in Malaysia (the DAP's vice president Karpal Singh had even stated that if PAS wanted to create an Islamic state they would 'have to step over my dead body') and some of PAS's senior ulama were also worried that the Islamist party's image might be compromised if it worked with the secularists of DAP. PAS also entered into a working relationship with the PRM that was likewise seen as a secular party. Then there was the newly minted Keadilan party that was formed by Anwar Ibrahim and his followers after his expulsion from the government, and which was led by his wife Wan Azizah. Together PAS, DAP, PRM and Keadilan formed the *Barisan Alternatif* (Alternative Front coalition) on 24 October 1999, and braced themselves for the campaign that was to follow.

On 29 November 1999, the tenth general elections of Malaysia were held and the contest turned out to be a bitter one: both UMNO and PAS accused each other of being the lackeys of the nefarious West, Zionist lobbyists and secular agents. The country was shocked by the results; PAS had swept to power in the states of Kelantan and Terengganu, and had also come close to taking control of Kedah. It had also made significant gains in the predominantly Malay-Muslim states of Perlis, Perak and Pahang. PAS won 27 parliamentary seats and 98 state assembly seats. Its parliamentary gains were significant: 10 in Kelantan, eight in Kedah, seven in Terengganu and two in Perak.[94] The state assembly results were even more impressive: 41 in Kelantan, 28 in Terengganu, 12 in Kedah, six in Pahang, four in Selangor, three in Perak, three in Perlis and one in Penang. Anwar's newly formed Keadilan won four Parliamentary seats, while UMNO won 176. Keadilan also won five parliamentary seats, making a total of 32 Malay opposition seats compared to UMNO's 61.

Keen observers of Malaysian politics such as Clive Kessler then noted that one major factor that contributed to PAS's success was how the UMNO-led government's Islamisation policy had effectively shifted the centre of political life closer to the Islamist register:

94 Among the PAS leaders who won their parliamentary seats were Tuan Guru Nik Aziz Nik Mat (Kelantan), Tuan Guru Hadi Awang and Mustafa Ali in Terengganu, Ustaz Fadzil Noor, Ustaz Nashruddin Mat Isa, Mahfuz Omar and Mohamad Sabu in Kedah. PAS's new members had also made a significant impact: Shahnon Ahmad, the infamous author of the novel *SHIT*, won his seat in Kedah, Kamaruddin Jaffar won his seat in Terengganu, while Dr. Hassan Ali won his state assembly seat in Selangor and Chinese convert Anuar Tan won the state assembly seat for Kota Bharu in Kelantan

> Even in the eyes of many UMNO party loyalists, one undeniable reason for the opposition's, and especially PAS's, advances against UMNO was a palpable and widespread discontent with, and even an emphatic rejection of, the 'modernist Muslim' alternative which Dr. Mahathir had rightly sought to proffer in opposition to PAS's neo-traditionalist Islamist agenda – but which he totally failed to spell out and develop in practice … A heavy price was paid for the failure to develop, positively and substantively, the modernist Muslim alternative.[95]

The DAP fared poorly compared to PAS at the elections of 1999,[96] and it appeared as if the Islamists' hour had finally arrived. For almost two decades, from 1982 to 1999, PAS had been at the vanguard of the criticism against the UMNO/BN-led Malaysian government. By then, the discursive frontier between the Islamists of PAS and the nationalists of UMNO had sharpened considerably, with severe consequences for both sides. But despite the sometimes overheated tone and tenor of the Islamist party, and notwithstanding the human cost that was borne by its leaders and members – some of whom paid dearly with their lives and liberty – PAS had yet to realise its ambition to capture the state and turn Malaysia into an Islamic state as the founders of the party had envisaged half a century earlier.

As the 20th century drew to a close, PAS settled back and was able to reflect upon the long road it had taken: from its left-leaning days of Islamic internationalism, through the tumultuous decade when it experimented with ethnonationalism and momentarily became part of the ruling coalition, right up to the period where it was at its radical revolutionary best.

95 Clive Kessler, 'UMNO's Malay Dilemma, or, In Search Again for the Way Forward'. Paper presented at the Malaysian Social Research Council (MSRC) conference in Kuala Lumpur, Feb. 2000, pp. 3-4.

96 Prior to the 1999 election, the DAP had been rocked by a number of internal scandals and disputes which soon spilled out into the open. In 1996, DAP leader Kua Kia Soong left the party after claiming that his nomination forms for the constituency of PJ Utara had been sabotaged by loyal followers of the party leader. He then published a book entitled *Inside the DAP* in which he personally attacked party president Lim Kit Siang and labelled him a dictator. In 1997, the DAP division in Perak broke into two camps. Then in 1998, dissident elements within the party began what they called the KOKS (Kick Out Kit Siang) campaign, led by prominent DAP leaders such as Wee Choo Keong (national publicity secretary), Liew Ah Kim (national vice-chairman) and Fung Ket Wing (national treasurer). The rebels claimed that Lim Kit Siang had run the party like a dictator for the past 32 years and was guilty of nepotism. By 1999, the party was badly divided within. The decision to join BA merely complicated matters further, as many DAP members did not feel comfortable with the idea of teaming up with PAS because they did not accept its project of creating an Islamic state. (Re: James Chin, *A New Balance: The Chinese Vote at the 1999 Malaysian General Elections,* Southeast Asia Research. 8(3), 2000. pp. 281-299).

All three streams of postcolonial Muslim thought remained in the party, at varying degrees of effectiveness and visibility, and yet PAS was still there, as one of the most complex political parties Malaysia had ever seen. The stage was set for yet more complexity, as PAS entered the 21st century assuming its latest avatar – as the party of Islamist Democrats.

4 The *Jihad* of the Ballot Box

PAS's Democratic Experiment: 2000-2013

> The fact is that all of us face a new historical situation every day. States, organisations, cultures, movements, even civilisations that are most successful are those that can manage, direct, guide, influence, anticipate, manipulate and control the forces of change.[1]
>
> Kalim Siddiqui, *Stages of the Islamic Revolution*

2000-2004: The New Century Explodes

> 'Taliban are our Brothers'
>
> Slogan on PAS banner, seen at the PAS demonstration at the American Embassy, Kuala Lumpur, 12 October 2001

As the new century dawned, PAS was in a position to count its winnings and survey the long road it had journeyed thus far. After being on the Malaysian political landscape for half a century, it was now the biggest Malay-Muslim opposition party in the country, with more than a million members, had managed to establish a presence in cyberspace and was in control of two states – Kelantan and Trengganu. For a party that once regarded itself as the 'orphaned child' of Malaysian politics, PAS had come into its own and had earned the respect that was being shown to it. PAS was then allied to the Keadilan and DAP parties, but there was no doubting the fact that it was the main opposition party in the country then. Crucially, the party had demonstrated that Islamism was here to stay and that it was set on the course of state capture.

Though PAS had begun to adopt the discourse of democratic engagement, there were still lingering reminders of the older PAS of the 1980s and 1990s in its ranks. The new generation of PAS technocrats and professionals had successfully given the party a new look by the late 1990s, but among the conservative ulama of PAS the old ways seemed best. To give Malaysians a glimpse of what the party had in mind if and when it would come to power at the Federal level, the new chief minister of Trengganu – Ustaz Hadi Awang – played the *hudud* card that he had tucked up his sleeve all along.

1 Kalim Siddiqui, *Stages of the Islamic Revolution*, London: Open Press, 1996, p. 2.

Shortly after the elections of 1999, Hadi announced that Trengganu would also have its own *hudud* ordinances, and that the PAS state government was bent on Islamising Trengganu society in no uncertain terms.

The federal government immediately reacted to Hadi Awang's challenge with the now-perfunctory response that such a move would be unconstitutional. They also argued that PAS's interpretation of *shariah* law was narrow, out of date and politically motivated. Despite protests from the federal government, non-Muslim community leaders, women's groups and civil rights NGOs, the government of Hadi Awang pressed on. Other highly controversial measures soon followed. In time, the Terengganu government introduced laws and regulations that had not even been introduced in neighbouring Kelantan, where PAS had been in power since 1990: the state government imposed a ban on mixed swimming pools and a total ban on all forms of 'decadent' behaviour including unisex hair salons and nightclubs. The secular leaders of DAP were as shocked by these moves as were the leaders of the BN.

As non-Muslim and moderate Muslim groups began to raise their concerns about Hadi's Islamisation programme, other PAS leaders took to the offensive and began to raise their own concerns about the loyalty and commitment of the non-Malays and non-Muslims in the country. Immediately after the 1999 election, a number of prominent PAS writers and propagandists openly denounced the Malaysian Chinese community in toto for not supporting the opposition coalition that was dominated by PAS. Some of these attacks were clearly couched in communitarian terms, depicting the Chinese as essentially greedy, avaricious and unprincipled (echoing the ethno-nationalist diatribes of the Asri Muda era of the 1970s). In his book *UMNO Tidak Relevan*, PAS writer Hussein Yaakub (also known as Ibnu Muslim through his writings in *Harakah*) wrote:

> The present developments have shown that the Chinese do not have a firm view of politics and they can easily be led this way and that by Chinese community leaders who are guided by their own interests in this country. It is true, as the Chinese businessmen themselves have often said, that the Tionghua community puts more value on peace and prosperity than on anything else. This means that the Chinese only think of money, business and wealth without considering other matters related to morals, dignity and justice.[2]

2 Re: Hussein Yaakub, UMNO Tidak Relevan, p. 120.

He then went on to add:

> In short, they [the Chinese] do not care about who actually runs this country as long as they can live and prosper. This is the philosophy of the Chinese in Malaysia that has been practised all along and which has been exploited during all the previous elections. … The questions of defending and upholding morals and resisting injustice have never attracted the concern of the Tionghua community in this country.[3]

In the same book, Yaakub also registered the blanket judgements made by other PAS leaders immediately before and after the 1999 election. One leader, Haji Malik Yusof (PAS state assemblyman for Tahan, Pahang), stated: *'I can see that the Chinese are not that interested in party-politics in general. All they want is peace and to be able do business.'*[4] Other PAS leaders also joined in the anti-Chinese backlash, calling for retaliatory action against the Chinese business community in particular. Mohamad Anang, head of the PAS electoral campaign bureau in Johor, was disappointed with the poor support given by the non-Malays at the election. He called for PAS members to break off economic links and stop engaging in business activities with Chinese and Indian businesses that had supported the BN government.[5] Salahuddin Ayub, PAS deputy youth leader and head of the Johor PAS information bureau then, likewise called for PAS members to boycott all Chinese and Indian businesses known to have supported BN.[6] Few of the PAS leaders appeared to have considered the negative effects of their own comments, and the consequences on Malay-Chinese and Muslim-non-Muslim relations in the country.

That PAS's leaders, members and propagandists were willing and able to assume such a confrontational stance towards the other communities in the country then was perhaps the result of their own self-confidence, after doing so well at the elections earlier. But Malaysia's political landscape has never been an isolated one, and as we have seen in the previous chapters the internal variables of Malaysian politics have always been affected by external variables beyond their control. In the following year an event would occur far away in the United States of America that would permanently alter PAS's own subject position in Malaysia, and force the Islamist party

3 Ibid., p. 121.
4 Ibid., p. 121.
5 Ibid., p. 63.
6 Ibid., p. 63.

to reposition itself yet again, against the wider backdrop of international geopolitics.

The year 2001, which marked the 50th anniversary of the *Parti Islam Se-Malaysia*, was destined to be a watershed in the history of the party. In January 2001, George W. Bush was elected as the president of the United States, after an election that witnessed protests against electoral irregularities. Bush's victory was greeted with considerable approval by several Muslim groups in America that shared his conservative values. Some Arab and Muslim interest groups had hoped that the new president would be more sympathetic to their demands, which ranged from the thorny issue of Palestine to the question of religious schools in the US. Little did they realise then that the man they chose to back would turn out to be the first US president to call for a 'crusade' against the 'menace of global Islamic terrorism'.

Right on cue, the *Taliban* of Afghanistan stepped in to provide the Western media with the ideal stereotype of the intolerant Muslim fanatic: in February 2001, the *Taliban* leader, self-proclaimed *Emir'ul Mukminin* (leader of the faithful), Mullah Muhammad Omar issued a decree calling for the destruction of the ancient Bamiyan Buddhas and every other statue in the country on the grounds that they were un-Islamic. He then ordered that a hundred cows be sacrificed all over the country, to atone for the sin of not destroying the statues earlier. The Western media pounced upon the event as proof of the intolerant nature of the *Taliban*, and Muslims by extension. The Malaysian media, in turn, lamented the actions of the *Taliban* on the grounds that they had once again damaged the image and reputation of Muslims the world over. PAS, predictably, assumed a position contrary to that of the mainstream media and Malaysian government, and condemned the West instead for its hypocrisy in lamenting the destruction of pieces of stone while the people of Afghanistan were starving. In this instance PAS was not alone, for the *Taliban* were also receiving the support of other Islamist groups like the *Jami'at-ul Ulema-i Islam* (JUI) in Pakistan and the *Laskar Jihad* of Indonesia.

Then on 11 September 2001 – the same day on which the British mandate for Palestine came into force in 1922 – the twin towers of the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York were rammed by two airliners hijacked by unknown individuals. Reports then came of a third airliner that had crashed into the Pentagon building, and a fourth intercepted and shot down before it could reach its intended target – the White House. To bring home the reality of the events that took place thousands of miles away, the Kuala Lumpur City Centre (KLCC) twin towers were evacuated the following day, after a

bomb scare that came just as Malaysians were coming to terms with the loss of Malaysian workers missing or killed in the New York attacks.

In the wake of the New York attacks, the Bush administration was quick to unilaterally declare its 'global war on terror', which in turn placed every single Muslim-led government in the world in a dilemma. The governments of Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey and the Arab and African states were left with the daunting prospect of having to appease an angry Washington bent on revenge while at the same time maintaining their own credibility and standing in the eyes of their respective Muslim-majority populations. The country that faced the heaviest pressure of all was Pakistan, where General Pervez Musharaf was already engaged in a violent and bitter struggle against Islamist extremists and Jihadi groups like the *Lashkar Tayeeba* that operating in the country, and who were openly opposed to any kind of co-operation with the West. Yet Pakistan was in no position to bargain, for it faced the prospect of further economic sanctions and arms embargos if it failed to deliver. Malaysia was likewise expected to take sides, though as Nair (1997) has shown, Islam has always been a significant factor in its foreign policy too. Since the Mahathir era began in 1981, Malaysia had strengthened its diplomatic and economic links with the rest of the Muslim world, and was keen to showcase itself as a model Muslim state for others to emulate. To openly support Bush's 'war on terror' would have been politically suicidal for any administration then, and PAS was always there to point out any shortcomings or contradictions in Malaysia's foreign policy.

The Malaysian government was understandably loath to be dragged into this debacle, as it had spent the last four years restructuring the economy and recapitalising its banks instead, following the East Asian economic crisis of 1997.[7] As we have seen earlier, the Malaysian government

7 In the wake of the East Asian financial crisis, the Malaysian government's priority was to restructure the banking system. By early 1998, two restructuring agencies, Danamodal and Danaharta, had been set up to recapitalise the troubled banks. Between 1998 and 2000, Danamodal injected more than RM8 billion (US$2.1 billion) into the local banking system. As a result, by 2001, Malaysian banks were rated as financially sound with an average capital-adequacy ratio of 13%, compared with the international norm of 8% (as recommended by the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision). By 2001, non-performing loans not serviced for more than three months had plummeted to 10%. (They had reached 25% at the peak of the crisis in 1998.) The Malaysian financial sector was forced to consolidate by the middle of 2001. Fifty-eight Malaysian financial institutions were to be merged into 10 superbanks. The other agency, Danaharta, was given sweeping powers by parliament to manage assets pledged to banks by debt-plagued companies. These assets accounted for about 80% of the RM47 billion it managed. Yet Danaharta had much less success than Danamodal. Though Danaharta claimed to have sold

had consented to the first invasion of Iraq on the grounds that Iraq had violated the territorial integrity of another country, Kuwait – which also happened to be a Muslim country. Malaysia had also demonstrated its own capacity and willingness to deal with radicalism when it acted against a number of home-grown militant groups such as the *Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia* (Malaysian Mujahideen Movement, KMM).[8] PAS's newspaper *Harakah* described the arrests of the KMM members as part of the Mahathir administration's attempt 'to woo the Americans'.[9] The paper also claimed that PAS would intensify its efforts to show how UMNO was anti-Islam.[10]

For PAS leaders, the arrest of veteran *mujahideen* fighters in Malaysia was something incomprehensible. PAS regarded their ex-*mujahideen* members as role models for the rank and file of the party, and their commitment to the Islamist struggle was seen as an exemplary form of conduct to be emulated, not criminalised. Kelantan PAS Youth Wing leader Takiyuddin Hassan claimed that such willingness to sacrifice their lives 'could only come from those who were committed to the Islamist struggle', and that PAS was 'proud of the fact that its members were willing and able to make such sacrifices in the name of their religion'.[11]

or restructured 75%, or about RM35 billion, of the assets it controlled, very little of this flowed back to the banks. Foreign observers criticised the Malaysian government's approach on the grounds that it allowed large companies to escape radical reforms. It was pointed out that the Renong Group (closely connected to UMNO) had modified its restructuring plan three times. The Lion Group, another large debtor, was allowed to escape painful restructuring by similar means (Far Eastern Economic Review, 11 January 2001).

8 In August 2001, the Malaysian government had detained 10 Islamist activists – many of whom were members of PAS – on the grounds that they belonged to an underground militant group called the Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM). The group's leader was said to be Ustaz Nik Adli Nik Aziz, the 34-year-old son of the Murshid'ul Am of PAS, Nik Aziz Nik Mat. Though Nik Adli was only a teacher at a religious school in Kelantan (of which his father was the Chief Minister), the authorities alleged that he had studied in a Pakistan madrasah and had spent time training and working with mujahideen militants in Afghanistan. Several other men arrested had also travelled to Pakistan for religious education and military training with the mujahideen operating along the Pakistan-Afghan border. On 25 September, Nik Adli was detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA) for two years, accused of plotting a campaign to establish Islamic rule across the region. Nik Adli was also alleged to have been planning to overthrow the Malaysian government, plotting assassinations and sending Muslims to fight Christians in Indonesia's Maluku islands. His period of alleged military training in Afghanistan in the early 1990s was also included in the list of accusations, but there was no overt allegation of direct links to the Taliban or the al-Qaeda network of Osama bin bin Laden.

9 'Tangkapan KMM di bawah ISA: Usaha PM Ambil Hati Amerika', Harakah, 16-31 August 2001.

10 Ibid., p. 32.

11 'Pemuda PAS bangga ahlinya pernah berjihad: Takayuddin', Harakah, 5 October 2001.

By the end of 2001, however, the situation had changed significantly as it became clear that it was America that was about to invade Afghanistan in reprisal for the *Taliban's* support of Osama bin Laden and the *al-Qaeda* organisation he led. The Mahathir administration called for a negotiated settlement and a proper investigation into who was really behind the attacks on New York. At the conference on Terrorism organised by the Institute for Strategic and International Studies (ISIS), Kuala Lumpur, on 17 November 2001, Dr. Mahathir pointed out that: 'Any number of people can use (Islam) for their own objectives. The main thing for them is to gain power. We are going to be faced with this problem for a long time. We know that we in Malaysia are vulnerable to such forms of extremism, like every other country in the world. Every one of us is vulnerable.'

Malaysia was already being drawn into the fray against its will.[12] As the American navy's battle group sailed beyond the Gulf and got closer to Pakistan and Afghanistan, it appeared as if the political actors in Malaysia – and other Muslim countries – would have to assume their respective ideological subject-positions soon. For the more conservative elements in PAS, who saw their Islamist party as one of many within the global network of Islamist movements that included the *Ikhwan'ul Muslimin, Jama'at-e Islami* and *Jami'at-ul Ulema-i Islam,* the decision of which side to take was not a difficult one, and the democratic struggle would have to wait for now. PAS leader Hadi Awang argued that 'the obligation for jihad is the primary responsibility of those in the country that is being attacked and in the neighbouring countries, while it is obligatory for all Muslims who live elsewhere to give their support and show their concern.'[13] Such hyperbole proved too much for PAS's erstwhile ally DAP, which had left the instrumental *Barisan Alternatif* coalition with PAS on the grounds that it could never accept PAS's stated ambition of turning Malaysia into an Islamic state. By then, however, PAS's rank and file were riding on the wave of anti-Americanism that was sweeping across the Muslim world.

12 Malaysia was unwittingly dragged into the investigations that followed the 11 September attack. First, a letter containing anthrax spores sent to an address in the US was said to have originated from Malaysia. It was later discovered that the letter was not contaminated and that nobody in Malaysia was involved. But the FBI's reports also pointed the finger at Malaysia when it was later revealed that Khalid al-Midhar, a close associate of Osama bin bin Laden, had met other associates in Malaysia in January 2000. Later, a former member al-Qaeda, Jamal Ahmed Al-Fadhl, told a US court that money was deposited in Malaysia – which Malaysian authorities denied.

13 Hadi Awang: Jihad Adalah Perisai Umat Islam, Harakah, 19 October 2001.

On 8 October, PAS leaders issued their strongest statement yet against the US. For the *Murshid'ul Am* of PAS Nik Aziz Nik Mat, the attack on Afghanistan was clearly an attack on Islam and Muslims in general. Speaking out in defence of the *Taliban* government, he claimed:

> The US hates the *Taliban* because the latter is firmly committed to upholding Islamic values. Osama bin Laden is just an excuse for the US, which has time and again shown its hostility towards Islam, to wage war against the religion.[14]

PAS president Ustaz Fadzil Noor also stated that the attacks were not only against Afghanistan's *Taliban* regime, but constituted a direct assault on Muslims the world over. Speaking to local and foreign journalists at a press conference, Fadzil Noor said: 'America has attacked a small and defenceless country like Afghanistan without showing the world strong reason or proof, (and) they are war criminals."[15] He added: 'If the Americans are really waging a war against terrorism, why don't they attack Israel, who are terrorists against the Palestinians?"[16] He ended the interview with a clarion call to arms when he stated that: 'all Muslims must oppose these criminals – this time, there is no denying a call for Jihad."[17] Finally, on 10 October 2001, PAS declared its 'jihad' against the US and its coalition partners and gave the go-ahead for its members to openly join and support the *Taliban*. The party's secretary-general Nashruddin Mat Isa stated:

> If there are any PAS members who would like to go for jihad, we cannot stop them because jihad is a religious duty. They don't need to seek party approval if they wish to take up the fight in Afghanistan.[18]

14 Mohd Irfan Isa, 'Osama an Excuse to Wage War against Islam: Nik Aziz', Malaysiakini.com, 10 October 2001.

15 'US Embassy under Guard, PAS Labels Americans 'War Criminals'', Malaysiakini.com, 8 October 2001.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 See Nur Abdul Rahman, 'Serangan Amerika Langkah Permusuhan ke atas Umat Islam', Harakah, 11 October 2001 and 'PAS Declares 'Jihad' over Attacks in Afghanistan', Malaysiakini.com, 10 October 2001. Nashruddin was quick to add that PAS's definition of jihad covered a 'wide spectrum including calling for peace, calling for justice and not just taking up arms'. He also noted that 'we [PAS] are not saying that we are going to create a force to do that. PAS is also not going to sponsor anyone.'

PAS's latest burst of anti-Americanism culminated in its rally in front of the American embassy in Kuala Lumpur on 12 October 2001. With the lens of almost every major local and international newspaper and TV station trained upon them, PAS leaders and members gathered to show their support for the *Taliban* and to condemn the United States and its allies Britain and Israel. This was the biggest demonstration in Kuala Lumpur since the *reformasi* demonstrations of 1998, but this time round the mood and tenor of the gathering had an altogether different edge. Forgotten were the calls for democracy, transparency and accountability: Many of the younger party members were wearing T-shirts, bandanas and armbands bearing slogans like *Allahuakbar, La illa ha illallah*, and *Jihad*. Placards and banners were hoisted with slogans like 'We love Jihad', 'Crush America', '*Taliban* are our brothers'. The day before the demonstration the Internet version of the party's paper, harakahdaily.com, featured a photo of PAS president Fadzil Noor and the head of its Youth Wing Mahfuz Omar burning the US flag at a PAS rally. Some of the PAS leaders present, such as Fadzil Noor, Mustafa Ali and Nashruddin Mat Isa, were eventually allowed to enter the embassy to deliver their memorandum of protest. Others like Mohamad Sabu were there to fire up the crowd with their speeches. (At least one PAS leader – Hatta Ramli – was on hand to calm down the demonstrators, but to no avail.)

The demonstration was only dispersed when the riot police used water cannons at close range to break up the crowd. One of the first PAS leaders to receive a direct hit by the water cannon was the party's president, Fadzil Noor.[19] PAS was quick to condemn the police action and accused the Malaysian security forces of being the 'tools of America' instead.[20] Overnight, PAS had made not only the local but also international headlines, and by doing so confirmed its standing as part of the international network of Islamist parties and movements across the world. But in the process of doing so it also confirmed the view of its critics that the party was bent on radical religious politics and was prepared to support causes that others were unwilling to support.

Notwithstanding the cost of associating themselves with Osama bin Laden and the *Taliban*, PAS pressed on regardless in its effort to lend its support for the people of Afghanistan. The party launched its own 'Afghan Jihad fund', appealing for donations from ordinary Malaysians – who, by

19 I was present to photograph the demonstration, and witnessed the incident myself.

20 'FRU Alat Amerika?' In Cabaran- Akhbar Suara Rakyat, 20 October 2001.

December had contributed RM300,000.[21] PAS was also active in Pakistan, sending delegations to the north of the country close to the Pakistan-Afghan border to deliver medical supplies, clothes and set up schools. Among the PAS-funded *madrasahs* that were established then was the *Madrasah Al-Noor* (named after the party's president, Ustaz Fadzil Noor) based at the new Jaluzi refugee camp near Peshawar, that was set up by PAS volunteers working with the Al-Khidmat Foundation of the Pakistani *Jama'at-e Islami* party. PAS even donated an ambulance to the camp, festooned with the PAS logo.[22]

With anger mounting across the Muslim world against the United States at the time, PAS's opposition to American foreign policy and its open support of the Afghans had earned it an abundance of brownie points. But in a couple of years' time, PAS would come to realise the true cost of professing their brotherhood with the *Taliban*, at the Malaysian elections of 2004.

The other consequence of PAS's new radical posturing was that it suddenly bolstered the image and standing of the Mahathir administration and the UMNO-led BN government. In the late 1990s, Prime Minister Mahathir had come under severe criticism by several Western leaders and the Western press for his handling of the Anwar Ibrahim affair and the manner in which Anwar had been removed from the political scene. But with PAS leaders baying for blood and mouthing slogans calling for Jihad, the UMNO-led government seemed to be a more palatable and moderate alternative to the opposition. Senior American leaders like US Trade Representative Robert B. Zoellick praised the Malaysian government for its support for the war on terror, and noted that American-Malaysia relations were improving. Trade between the two countries amounted to US$38 billion (RM144 billion) a year and America was, after all, Malaysia's biggest trading partner at the time. Later that year, Prime Minister Mahathir and President Bush met for the first time at the APEC conference in Shanghai, and discovered that they could get along with each other. (President Bush even noted that Prime Minister Mahathir 'had a sense of humour' – an observation that presumably did not go down too well with the dour conservatives of PAS then.)

On the domestic front, PAS was finding itself increasingly isolated as well. Having been dumped by the DAP, in November ABIM's president Ahmad Azam Abdul Rahman publicly stated that ABIM felt that Dr. Mahathir was

21 'Derma Jihad untuk Afghanistan', Fikrah Harakah, 1 December 2001.

22 'Sumbangan Tabung Afghanistan mula nampakkan hasilnya', Harakah, 15 December 2001.

indeed a model Muslim leader and Malaysia was a model Islamic society for the rest of the Muslim world to follow.[23] By then, the positions taken by both PAS and UMNO were almost entirely fixed and sedimented, with little room for manoeuvre: PAS, by virtue of its standing as part of the global Islamist network, was not able to compromise on its stand against the US and the West, or its support for the *Taliban*. UMNO, on the other hand, was forced to address the realities of geopolitics and was disinclined to jeopardise Malaysia's international standing and economic-strategic alliances, even if some Muslim members of UMNO were uncomfortable with the conduct of the US-led alliance in Afghanistan (and later Iraq). At a time when neither party could reverse or advance its own position, there occurred two events that once again altered the landscape of Malaysian politics: The departure of Dr. Mahathir Mohamad and Fadzil Noor.

On 22 June 2002 Dr. Mahathir shocked the members of his UMNO party when he suddenly – and with no warning whatsoever – announced that he was resigning from his post as party president. He had just returned from yet another trip to Europe, where he had stopped at the Vatican to pay an official visit to the Pope (during which he brought up the issue of Palestine and the need for Muslims and Christians to work towards a more just international order). Just how and why Mahathir had resigned in so dramatic a manner remained a mystery for 24 hours, until the country was given another rude shock: the very next day PAS lost its president, Ustaz Fadzil Mohd Noor, who had undergone heart bypass surgery two weeks before and had never recovered from his operation. Already suffering from diabetes and hypoglycaemia for 17 years, Fadzil Noor slipped into a state of unconsciousness after his operation and was kept under close watch in the

23 Utusan Malaysia, 19 November 2001. ABIM's sudden U-turn was brought about by a number of factors, most related to domestic politics and the complex internal rivalries between ABIM, PAS and Keadilan. At Keadilan's first annual party election, serious divisions had appeared between Keadilan's ex-ABIM and ex-UMNO members (close personal aides and advisors to Anwar Ibrahim). Differences of opinion and tactics had emerged between the two groups. It was already well known that ABIM members of Keadilan opposed the proposed merger between the party and leftist PRM. Many speculated that the merger proposals were being pushed ahead by ex-ABIM leader Anwar Ibrahim, who was then in jail. The run-up to the election witnessed much acrimonious debate and mud-slinging, where ex-ABIM members were accused of wanting to take over the party and to 'ABIMise' it. In the end, all ABIM candidates (Mohamad Anuar Tahir, Dr. Muhammad Nur Manuty, Ruslan Kassim and Mustafa Kamil Ayub) lost. In the wake of the election, many ABIM leaders felt the need to distance themselves and their movement from Keadilan and its ally PAS. Ahmad Azam's open declaration of support for the Mahathir administration therefore came at a time when ABIM was trying to find a way out of the impasse within the opposition Keadilan-PAS-DAP alliance.

intensive care unit of the Hospital Universiti Kebangsaan. His condition slowly deteriorated and at 10.00 a.m. on Sunday 23 June 2002, he passed away.

For some local political observers, the death of Fadzil Noor marked the hiatus of PAS's 'democratic experiment'. As writer Terence Netto noted:

> (Fadzil) glittered briefly on the national political stage and stuttered out in a whimper. Death came rather unexpectedly to Ustaz Fadzil Noor, but it was, in a sense, an opposite coda to a career whose author had already become marginal to the tide he rode with prescience to a central role in the Malaysian Opposition and that petered out in the aftermath of Sept 11 … After that it was relentlessly downhill. PAS's support for the *Taliban* and calls for jihad projected starkly its medieval moorings, something that Fadzil managed to screen through adroit manoeuvres over three years from September 1998. PAS's doctrinaire support for the *mullahs* who destroyed the Bamiyan statues and sheltered Osama bin Laden confirmed that the party's recently urbane exterior was a veneer camouflaging an essentially medieval core. Also, the unyielding determination of PAS deputy president and Terengganu *Menteri Besar* Tuan Guru Abdul Hadi Awang to introduce Islamic law in the state has polarised political society across party lines – into against-*hudud* and for-*hudud* factions. Fadzil, an Islamist politician of faintly liberal credentials, would have found that divide beyond his capacity to straddle. In that sense his death came not too soon.[24]

Ustaz Hadi Awang then stood up to the plate and assumed the leadership of PAS, while Tuan Guru Nik Aziz remained as the party's *Murshid'ul Am*. Despite the reforms that had been attempted by the moderate reformers of the party in the late 1990s, PAS was still inclined to maintain its place in the ranks of the global Islamist movement, and allied itself – internationally – to some of the more conservative Islamist parties and movements abroad. In December 2003, it sent its representatives to attend the International Islamic Conference that was held as a part of centenary celebrations of Syed Abul A'la Maudoodi in Lahore, Pakistan, organised under the auspices of the *Jama'at-e Islami* party. At the conference, the representatives of the Islamist parties present (PAS included) agreed to issue a joint statement

24 Terence Netto, 'Fleeting Ride of Moderate Islamist Fadzil Noor', Malaysiakini.com, 24 June 2002.

declaring their concerted commitment to combat the 'anti-Islamic forces' of the world. The *Communiqué* of the conference noted that:

> (The) Anti-Islamic forces have become ONE to attack the Muslim *Ummah*. Muslim unity is the most important need of the hour. Muslims should unite ending their trivial differences to frustrate all conspiracies.[25]

The *Communiqué* also noted that 'Jihad was necessary to establish a social life based on Justice' and that 'the Jihad will continue to the day of Judgement'.[26]

Despite the fact that the leadership of the Islamist party seemed to be equally split between the moderate reform-minded technocrats on the one hand and the conservative ulama on the other, PAS seemed confident that its fortunes would rise in the long-run. During his September 2003 interview with BBC's Tim Sabastian for the programme *Hard Talk*, PAS leader Mustafa Ali reiterated his party's struggle for reform. Though the ulama leadership of PAS may have had other things to say about the matter, Mustafa Ali went as far as defending the freedom of belief – including the right of Muslims to change their religion, as long as they do so 'quietly' – and claiming that PAS's *hudud* laws would apply only to Muslims. Insisting that PAS would abide by the principles of the Malaysian constitution, Mustafa Ali emphasised that PAS, as an Islamist party, wanted to promote freedom, justice and democracy. When asked by Tim Saebastian if he thought that PAS would eventually come to power in Malaysia, Mustafa Ali's response was a typically political one: *'Insha-Allah'* (God willing). The results of the elections of 2004 suggested that God was not inclined to allow PAS to capture the state, just yet.

The 2004 Election Debacle and the Resurgence of the Reformist 'Erdogan' Faction in PAS

As PAS prepared itself for the general elections of 2004, the reformists of the party busied themselves with the task of representing the Islamist party as the party of Islamist democrats. Once again, the business suits

25 Communiqué of The International Islamic Conference held as a part of Centenary Celebrations of Maulana Syed Abul A'la Maudoodi. (Section.3.) 7 December 2003.
26 Ibid., Section. 6.

were donned and the corporate image brushed up, and prominent PAS leaders like Hassan Ali, Dzulkefly Ahmad, Hatta Ramli and Kamaruddin Jaafar came to the fore to project their vision of a new Islamist party that was committed to democracy and the rule of law. But it was unclear to what extent the discourse of PAS was accepted – or even believed – by the Malaysian electorate for whom the memory of PAS's Jihad against the West was still relatively new.

PAS had also lost the support of the DAP which had abandoned the BA coalition, and was forced to struggle with only the fledgling *Keadilan* party as its ally. Compounding PAS's difficulties was the fact that UMNO was then led by a new leader, Dato' Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

Prime Minister Badawi was, like his predecessor Dr. Mahathir, an entirely different sort of UMNO leader. If the first four leaders of UMNO – Onn Jaafar, Tunku Abdul Rahman, Tun Razak and Hussein Onn – had come from aristocratic and royal families, Badawi (like Mahathir) had risen from a relatively humble background. His father, as we have seen in chapter one, was one of the ulama of UMNO who was for a while a member of PAS as well. (In fact it was his father, Ustaz Badawi, who had read the manifesto 'Ulama on the Path of Allah' at the November Congress of 1951 that led to the formation of PAS.) Badawi's academic background in Islamic studies also meant that he was the first UMNO president who was qualified to speak about Islam with some knowledge and authority. He was also dubbed the 'Mr Clean' of UMNO, and declared that 'my hand has never signed a detention order' – a fact that was appealing to many Malaysians who by then had grown somewhat jaded and tired by the more authoritarian form of politics of the Mahathir era.

With both UMNO and PAS led by new leaders and both parties attempting to woo the electorate with a new bag of promises, the elections were finally held on 21 March 2004. The results proved to be a spectacular success for UMNO and the BN, and an utter debacle for PAS and its ally *Keadilan*.

At the elections of March 2004, the *Barisan Nasional* won 63.9% of the popular votes, which translated into 198 parliamentary seats – the highest number of seats won by the BN since the election of 1978. Almost all the parties of the BN coalition managed to make gains at the elections, with the *Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu* (PBB) gaining five, GERAKAN gaining four, MIC gaining two and MCA gaining two as well. But it was UMNO that truly reaped the bountiful harvest, raising its number of parliamentary seats by a whopping 38 parliamentary seats. PAS and the other opposition parties were dumbstruck by the outcome: *Keadilan's* number of parliamentary seats dropped to one (won by Anwar Ibrahim's

wife Wan Azizah) while PAS's share of parliamentary seats was drastically slashed from 27 to only 7 (after winning 15.2% of the popular vote). Almost all the gains that PAS had made in Trengganu and Kedah at the previous election had been cancelled out, and it barely hung on to the state of Kelantan. Only the DAP managed to make some gains, raising its number of seats from 10 to 12.

Prime Minister Badawi – appraised by his allies and adversaries alike as a mild mannered and soft-spoken leader with few pretensions – had stunned the country by becoming the Malaysian Prime Minister who had won the biggest mandate in Malaysian political history. The 2004 elections came at a time when interreligious violence was once again rearing its ugly head in the region, with Muslim-Christian violence flaring in parts of Indonesia next door; and when the Malaysian public were wary of radical groups that might pose a threat to the country's racial and religious harmony. Though Badawi had promised a swathe of new structural and institutional reforms (including more civilian oversight and control of the police force, and less censorship of the media), it is quite likely that his own image as a moderate Muslim played an important part in delivering to UMNO and the BN the victory it so badly needed then.

PAS, on the other hand, was crestfallen and bitterly disappointed, not least by the fact that it had been decisively rejected not only by the non-Muslims of Malaysia, but also by a considerable number of moderate Muslim voters, too.

Though PAS's overt support for the *Taliban* and Osama incurred a considerable political cost at the 2004 elections, it is important to note that by this stage we can already see evident signs of predictability in terms of the Islamist party's political choices and overall behaviour. PAS's immediate concern was to establish and maintain its ideological-political distance from its arch nemesis UMNO, which in practical terms meant taking *any* position that was diametrically opposed to that of its opponent. Secondly PAS was also beholden to external factors, the chief of which was its belonging to a global fraternity of like-minded Islamist parties and movements that struggled on the long road to state capture in their respective countries. PAS's oppositional stand on the 'war on terror' reflected the general stand taken by other Islamist parties and groups as well, and it would have been hard for PAS to pursue an alternative route if it wanted to remain in the global Islamist club. Though some local and foreign observers of Malaysian politics were flabbergasted by PAS's support for the *Taliban* – which was seen as damaging and counter-productive to their own party-political interests – we cannot overlook the fact that as

an Islamist party that is part of a bigger global Islamist movement, PAS was not always able to act unilaterally, and sail too far from the global Islamist flotilla.

Notwithstanding the near-catastrophic outcome of the 2004 elections, the results did offer the moderate reformists of PAS another opportunity to project their vision of what PAS ought to look like in the 21st century. The conservatives of the Islamist party had been shown just where their fiery rhetoric would lead their party to, while the moderate reformists had made their point: Malaysia was not ready for an Islamist party that would drag it down the path of Jihad, at whatever cost. And despite the sabre-rattling rhetoric of PAS's leaders, *not a single PAS member* was reported to have travelled to Afghanistan to support the *Taliban* in their war against the Americans. The 2004 elections were a repeat of the 1986 election disaster where PAS was taught that hot-headed polemics do not necessarily translate into more votes or seats being won. The hour of the moderates had arrived, and for the coming decade it would be the 'Erdogans' who would be in the driving seat – albeit with the conservatives and ethno-nationalists attempting to grab the wheel time and again.

Another factor that helped the moderate reformists of PAS gain the upper hand during the 2004 to 2008 period was the style of government that was introduced by Prime Minister Badawi himself, who likewise championed the cause of socio-political reform. PAS, it has to be remembered, did not and could not control the state apparatus as it had not succeeded in its goal of state capture. As such, PAS was still unable to affect any meaningful changes to the broader institutional and structural framework of Malaysian society. For the moderates in PAS to succeed, they required a more open and liberal context within which their discourse of Islamist democracy could thrive and make sense. Ironically this context was provided by the reforms of Badawi himself, who opened up Malaysia's public political domain more than any prime minister before him.

It was during the Badawi administration (2004-2008) that Malaysian society experienced an opening up of the public domain: The new administration promised a series of wide-ranging reforms of the police, judiciary and other institutions of state; calling for more openness and transparency in governance and a more open Malaysian society. Shortly after his victory in 2004, the opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim – who was himself a former deputy prime minister – was released from prison. Badawi ushered in a new era of inclusive and accommodative Malaysian politics, and he professed to be the 'Prime Minister to all Malaysians'. During his second independence day speech (31 August 2005) he uttered the famous line 'No

Malaysian is more Malaysian than another',[27] a gesture that earned him the respect and support of Malaysians of all backgrounds, particularly among the non-Malays.

The extent to which Prime Minister Badawi was able to deliver his reform promises, however, was determined by a range of internal and external variable factors that impacted on Malaysia at the time: Unfortunately for him the logic of the global 'war on terror' meant that Malaysia was compelled to demonstrate its opposition to all forms of radical Islamist politics, and to commit itself – however reluctantly – to Bush's global crusade. As noted earlier, Badawi himself had come from a family of religious scholars and was regarded as well-versed in Islamic knowledge. In an effort to project Malaysia's moderate credentials at home and abroad, the Prime Minister foregrounded his own school of thought which came under the label of '*Islam Hadari*' ('Civilisational Islam').

The *Islam Hadari* project was an attempt to return to the fundamentals of Islam in order to convince Muslims (and non-Muslims) that Islam was essentially a religion of peace and civilisational development. The religious scholars who were roped into the project were expected to demonstrate that from the outset Islam was a force for social development, with a strong emphasis on positive normative values. To that end a number of high-profile conferences and research projects on *Islam Hadari* were held in Malaysia, with the prime minister's support and encouragement.

PAS predictably labelled *Islam Hadari* a bogus mode of modernism that was Badawi's own invention. The ulama of PAS argued that there was no reference to *Islam Hadari* in the *Quran* or *Hadith*, and that the Prophet himself had never mentioned such a thing. Worsening matters for Badawi was the shift to a visibly narrow and conservative mode of Islamic praxis in the country, with the growth of a parallel religious bureaucracy that was out of synch with the aims of *Islam Hadari.* The religious bureaucracy, as we have seen in the earlier chapters, had been growing since the 1970s

27 The importance of Badawi's utterance should not be underestimated; what the prime minister had effectively done in his speech was spell out – in the clearest terms possible – that all Malaysian citizens had an equal claim of identity and belonging in/to Malaysia. This came after decades of interethnic discord in the country that had witnessed repeated attempts by right-wing Malay ethnonationalists to claim Malaysia as the land of the Malays, and by extension to deny other communities the same rights of entitlement and belonging to the country. Coming as it did shortly after the exit of Mahathir, Badawi's speech signalled the beginning of a new politics that was meant to be more open and inclusive to all Malaysians. Unfortunately for Badawi opposition to his liberal outlook came mostly from the members of his own party, UMNO.

when the Islamisation race between UMNO and PAS had begun; and over the past three decades had been the arm of the state that was responsible for the neutralisation of other Islamic threats to state power, such as the *Darul Arqam* movement. By the 2000s, however, it had grown so large that it was becoming a power unto itself. While the Badawi administration called for the opening up of the Muslim mind in Malaysia, the country's religious authorities were banning more books than ever before – leading to the near-comical contradiction of the banning of the works of the author Karen Armstrong, while the author herself was invited by the Malaysian government to attend a conference on Islam in Malaysia.

This was the period when the contradictions of the Malaysian postcolonial developmental model had become evident: Since Malaya's independence in 1957 and the creation of Malaysia in 1963, the Malaysian state had been pursuing a nation-building project that was predicated on maintaining some kind of balance between the various ethnic and religious communities in the country. The Malaysian government had never really been able to bring the various centrifugal forces of the country closer together, and the question of what constituted Malaysian national identity remained unanswered. For the pluralist logic of the multi-ethnic BN ruling coalition meant that all the ethnic and religious communities of the country would demand their share of the public domain and fair representation in the national narrative. To this end Chinese and Indian vernacular schools remained protected by the state, as were the religious Muslim schools as well. At the same time however the religious bureaucracy of Malaysia – which was dominated by Malay-Muslims who had themselves been the beneficiaries of the New Economic Policy since the 1970s – was also a legitimate branch of the state that demanded its allocation of resources, authority and power. The Badawi era was one when all these competing (and at times contradicting) demands were being articulated in a public domain that was freer than ever before.

Badawi's relaxation of the rules and controls that once kept Malaysian society in check meant that the public domain was growing bigger. The internet added to the expansion of this domain as cyberspace became the new frontier to conquer. As we saw in the previous chapter, PAS had already made its foray into cyberspace and found a receptive audience among the younger generation of Malay-Muslim youth who were better educated, better connected and upwardly socially mobile. By the mid-2000s, Malaysian cyberspace was the home to a wide array of new alternative media sources, with websites like *Malaysiakini.com, TheMalaysianInsider.com, AgendaDaily.com* and *FreeMalaysiaToday.com* setting the new news agenda. From 1999 the opposition parties had been calling for a boycott of

the mainstream press that was seen as allied to the ruling BN, and by the mid-2000s it was the alternative press that was winning the battle for the hearts and minds of Malaysians. Later, the advent of social networking tools such as *Myspace.com, Friendster.com* and *Facebook.com* would open up even more opportunities for political parties and NGOs to reach out to the young audience who were tired of the same old news that they were getting from the same old mainstream media outlets, and PAS was among the first parties to use these tools to expand its support and membership base too.

This was the structural-institutional context that PAS found itself in during the Badawi era: Where older notions of the nation-state's authority, power and territoriality were being challenged and in some instances superseded by the new communicative infrastructure that was being created by the forces of global capital. Malaysia, as one of the countries in Southeast Asia that was at the forefront of the globalisation process, was in no position to reverse it or to even control it. The nation's sense of place and belonging was being challenged by the new economic-technological realities in an age of capital-driven development, where airline travel was becoming cheaper, borders more porous, and ideas were circulating wildly.

Aiding PAS was the fact that the Badawi administration largely welcomed these new developments, and generally took a positive attitude towards the new Malaysia that was in the making. The prime minister attempted to weave a new national discourse that was inclusive and accommodating to all the demands that were being articulated by the different groups in the country – but failed to note that many of these demands were in themselves particular and exclusive. One factor that had not been accounted for was the disproportionately high representation of UMNO parliamentarians in Parliament following the 2004 elections. This in turn further contributed to the marginalisation of the non-Malay component parties in the *Barisan Nasional*, notably MCA, MIC and Gerakan. Aggravating the situation was the rise of an increasingly virulent and bellicose new rhetoric in the language of UMNO leaders, as demonstrated by the antics of the then leader of the party's Youth wing Hishamuddin Onn, who on two occasions – despite protests from MCA and other BN component parties – brandished the Malay *keris*[28] (dagger) at the UMNO assembly and called for the defence of Malay rights. The net effect of these theatrics was the further weakening of MCA, MIC and Gerakan, the undermining of Badawi's pluralist and inclusive

28 For a critical look at the Keris and its evolution, see: Farish A. Noor, Pity the Poor Keris: How an Overdetermined Marker became a Symbol of Ethno-nationalist Politics, in Noor, What Your Teacher Didn't Tell You: The Annexe Lectures Vol. 1, Kuala Lumpur: Matahari Books, 2009.

message to the people, and driving the non-Malay voters into the arms of the opposition who were more than happy to receive them.

In the absence of a discourse of universal citizenship as the glue that bound Malaysians together, Badawi's nation-building programme faltered in the face of rising communitarian demands. UMNO stalwarts demanded that Malay rights and privileges be defended at all costs, and while Badawi sought to appease some of these demands he also had to appease the demands of the non-Malay-Muslims who felt themselves increasingly marginalised. Things came to a head with the controversies over freedom of religion, the right to conversion, the right of Christians to use the word 'Allah' in their vernacular publications, and most glaring of all the plight of the country's Hindu minority who protested over the destruction of Hindu temples in the country. The last controversy served as the cause to the foundation of the Malaysian Hindu Rights Action Force, Hindraf. Hindraf was led primarily by a number of Malaysian lawyers of Tamil-Hindu descent, including Ponnusamy Uthayakumar, Ponnusamy Waytha Moorthy, Malayalam Manoharan, K. Ganghadaran and S. Ganapathi Rao.

The emergence of Hindraf marked another landmark in Malaysian history, for it was the first overtly Hindu political movement in the country. For half a century, Malaysians had witnessed the rise of political Islam, and now it appeared that political Hinduism was about to become a reality in the country too. To demonstrate its pull among the Hindus of the country, Hindraf organised one of the biggest popular demonstrations ever in the recent history of Malaysia when it gathered tens of thousands of predominantly Tamil Hindus in Kuala Lumpur to call upon the government to look into the welfare of the country's Hindu minority. Coming at a time when the Badawi administration was keen to project the image of Malaysia as a moderate and liberal Muslim society abroad, the Hindraf movement was perhaps one of the strongest signals of the failure of Badawi's nation-building drive and the *Islam Hadari* project. Hindraf's leaders used the internet and other modes of communication to turn their local movement into an international one, and even managed to send representatives to India and Europe to solicit support for the country's Hindu minority.[29]

Struggling to cope with the growing array of mutually-exclusive demands from his own party and the demands of the minority communities that turned to him for support and protection, Badawi's administration stut-

29 Farish A. Noor, The Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) of Malaysia: Communitarianism Across Borders? Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) Working papers, Nanyang Technical University, Singapore, September 2009.

tered. Mid-way through his term in office the soft-spoken Badawi attracted the attention of opposition-supporting bloggers, media critics and social commentators, and was given the dubious honour of being labelled the 'sleeping Prime Minister'.

The circumstances were thus ripe for PAS to mount an effective challenge against the authority of the Badawi administration then, for the new communicative infrastructure that had been introduced in Malaysia offered them – and all the other opposition parties, NGOs and movements of the country – novel means through which they could represent themselves in a borderless world that was beyond the policing powers of the state. As Lubeck and Britts (2001) have noted:

> We live in an intellectual moment when the complexity of the global Islamic revival renders it difficult to generalize about Muslim institutions, social movements and discursive practices. While diversity and locality remain paramount features of Muslim society, globalization has inadvertently nurtured the extension of transnational Muslim networks into a web of interconnected sites. Quite opportunistically, urban-based Muslim networks now thrive in the interstitial spaces created by the new global communication and transportation infrastructures.[30]

Developments that were taking place beyond the shores of Malaysia were also giving the Islamists of PAS the opportunity to demonstrate their religious-ideological credentials while affirming their place in the constellation of global Islamist actors. In late 2005, the 'Muhammad cartoon controversy' that erupted as a result of the publication of a series of caricatures of the Prophet by a Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* served as the catalyst for yet another round of West-bashing by PAS and its allies. When the cartoons were republished several months later (including by other European papers such as *Charlie Hebdo* and *France Soir* of France), their republication was seen by some as a direct act of provocation; leading to the claim that *Jyllands-Posten* was engaged in a deliberate campaign to vilify Muslims and their religious beliefs. By February 2006, the campaign

30 Paul Lubeck and Bryana Britts, Muslim Civil Society in Urban Public Spaces: Globalisation, Discursive Shifts and Social Movements, in J. Eade and C. Mele (eds.), Urban Studies: Comparatory and Future Perspectives, London: Blackwell, 2001, p. 47.

against the cartoons and the newspaper that published them had developed its own momentum and its impact had been spread further afield.[31]

When news of the cartoon controversy reached Malaysia, PAS's leader Hadi Awang challenged the prime minister to do something about it. Prime Minister Badawi condemned the publication of the cartoons in no uncertain terms, but was also aware of the fact that Malaysia could do little else for it also had to abide by the norms of international law. As was the case in other Muslim countries such as Indonesia and Pakistan, the Islamist opposition then seized the opportunity for one-upmanship, and threw the gauntlet at the feet of the government. In Pakistan some of the more radical groups had even dared the government to send assassin 'hit squads' to Denmark to kill the offending cartoonist. In Indonesia groups like the *Fron Pembela Islam*, the *Majlis Mujahideen Indonesia* and former militants from groups like the banned *Laskar Jihad* took to the streets and attacked the Danish embassy as well as the offices of other Western embassies and companies.[32]

Not to be outdone, on 10 February 2006 PAS called for a massive rally and a crowd of 10,000 PAS members and supporters gathered in front of the Danish embassy in the area of Ampang in Kuala Lumpur, chanting slogans like *'Hancur Denmark'* ('Crush Denmark') and *'Mati Denmark'* ('Death to Denmark'). Also visible were members of PAS holding up banners and portraits of the late leader of the Iranian revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini – a move that was bound to grab the headlines and the attention of cameras present, and which could only have damaged Malaysia's keenly cultivated image as a moderate Muslim state willing to work with the West and the USA in particular.[33]

PAS's protests in Malaysia were clearly an attempt to embarrass the Malaysian government and to attack both the state's institutions and media services

31 By late January the reaction of the Muslim world had grown both in scale and its visibility: Saudi Arabia was the first to recall its ambassador to Denmark on 26 January 2006 and on 30 January armed gunmen raided and attacked the European Union's main office in Gaza, in reprisal against the publications of the cartoons. On the very next day (31 January) the newspaper Jyllands-Posten officially apologised for the cartoons, stating that it was not their intention to hurt the feelings of Muslims. By then it was practically impossible to stop the controversy from boiling over and having a global impact. On 4 February Syrian demonstrators attacked the Danish and Norwegian embassies in Damascus, and on the following day Lebanese demonstrators burned down the Danish embassy in Beirut. On 7 February the Danish embassy in Tehran was attacked by Iranian demonstrators and the Iranian government promptly cut off diplomatic ties with the country. In the following weeks copycat protests were held in Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia, led by local Islamist parties and movements acting in solidarity with their ideological counterparts overseas.

32 Indonesia Laments Danish Pullout, BBC World Service, 12 February 2006, and Danes in Indonesia 'Under Threat': Report, BBC World Service, 12 February 2006.

33 'Death to Denmark … say thousands'. Malaysiakini.com, 10 February 2006.

that were regarded as being either pro-government or working in the service of the Malaysian state. One such instance was the PAS-led rally demonstrating against a cartoon that appeared in the Malaysian English-language daily paper *The New Straits Times* (NST), which was regarded by many Malaysians as the English mouthpiece of the Malaysian government. On 21 February 2006 leaders and supporters of PAS, along with other Muslim NGOs, protested outside the offices of the NST against a cartoon that they regarded as offensive to Muslims.[34] PAS demanded that the NST's permit to publish be withdrawn and lodged a police report against the editors of the paper, which was an embarrassment to the Malaysian government for it had withdrawn the publishing permit of two other newspapers – *The Sarawak Tribune* and *Guanming Daily* – two weeks earlier, for having reproduced the Muhammad cartoons that had originally appeared in the *Jyllands-Posten* of Denmark.[35]

While PAS was busy chipping away at the credentials of the Badawi administration and undermining the Prime Minister's *Islam Hadari* project, the reformists among its leadership were also occupied with the task of reaching out to the Malaysian electorate and developing PAS's other image as the Islamist party that defended and promoted democracy and human rights.

By the second half of Badawi's term in office, PAS was being taken more seriously by the international diplomatic and academic community: In late November 2006 the Office for Germany's Dialogue with the Muslim World of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs funded a dialogue tour where Islamists from Southeast Asia were invited to Berlin, Germany to share their experience of the political process with German policy-makers, diplomats, party leaders, academics and students. Indonesia's *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera* (PKS) were invited, as was PAS – which sent as their representatives Drs. Hatta Ramli and Dzulkefly Ahmad (who was then head of the Research Bureau of the Islamist party). PAS's younger side was represented by the journalist and blogger Haris Zalkapli, who remains one of the most prolific young writers of PAS today, who continues to write about international affairs and global politics.[36]

34 'Offensive Cartoon: Oh No! Not Again!' Malaysiakini.com, 21 February 2006.

35 The irony, however, was that the cartoon that appeared in the NST had nothing to do with the cartoons of the Prophet, but was rather a satirical comment on the cartoon controversy itself. Nonetheless, it provided PAS with enough flimsy pretext to mount a demonstration and denounce the NST and the government for being 'soft' on those who had 'abused and insulted Islam'.

36 The author was one of those who organised the two-week lecture and dialogue tour of the Islamists in Germany, and the entire event was also co-hosted by the Zentrum Moderner Orient (ZMO, Centre for the Modern Orient), Berlin. The funding for the event came solely from the German government, which was then keen to engage with the newly emerging Islamist parties of Asia in order to better understand them.

During their two-week stay in Berlin, the leaders of PAS spoke at both Freie University and Humbold University, engaged with German academics as well as students, met up with local human rights activists, and were particularly impressed by the German peace activists who had organised the massive anti-war demonstration in Berlin against the invasion of Iraq. The leaders of PAS also met with members of the German Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD), with whom they discussed the concept of the welfare state – An idea that would later emerge as part of PAS's new political vocabulary at the coming elections back home in Malaysia. If PAS's reformers were impressed with Germany's welfare state model, then the Berlin press were puzzled by the youngest member of the delegation, Haris Zalkapli – who had expressed his earnest wish to meet and interview the German *Neue Deutsche Härte* band *Rammstein,* who were known for their trauma-inducing music and hits such as *Amerika* and *Ohne Dich* (2004). PAS had certainty come a long way from its formative years in the 1950s, when it could not even afford to rent an office for itself.

While PAS's reformist leaders were engaging with Malaysian youth and the international community, developments back in Malaysia were not so rosy for the Badawi administration. By late 2007 Malaysian society seemed deeply divided against itself. The opening up of the public domain had led to the sudden proliferation of websites, blogs, pressure groups as well as NGOs across the country. The Malaysian NGO scene had literally exploded with dozens of new NGOs and lobby groups, and had grown more complex as well: In the 1980s to the 1990s, most of the Malaysian NGOs tended to be left-leaning and secular in character. But by the late 2000s, there had emerged on the scene a myriad of new right-leaning ethnic-based NGOs that were championing more sectarian causes such as Malay rights and privileges (which was in itself an indication of how UMNO's appeal to the Malays had eroded by then).

It is one of the sad ironies of the late Badawi era that the prime minister who had attempted to placate the demands of all the different ethnic and religious groups had ended up failing to satisfy any of them. The fault, however, lay less in Badawi's policies – that were inclusive and accommodative on most accounts – but rather in the exceedingly complex structure of Malaysia's multifarious society that was, by then, characterised by what could be described as hyper-pluralism. The non-Malay groups – such as Hindraf – had demanded protection of the non-Muslim community, but these demands were met with a hostile response from the Malay ethnonationalists. The Malay NGOs, on the other hand, had demanded a reassertion of Malay identity politics as the basis of national identity, but this could not be done without alienating the non-Malay voters. In the end, the hyper-plural nature

of Malaysian politics, configured and articulated as it was along the lines of populist identity politics, had rendered any meaningful form of national reconciliation almost impossible: Malays and non-Malays; Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Buddhists, were all equally upset and angry.[37]

The beneficiaries of this state of muddled affairs were the opposition parties of the country, who tapped into the collective grievances of the masses in order to re-launch yet another coalition against the BN – which was called the *Pakatan Rakyat* (People's Coalition) that comprised of PAS, DAP and the revamped *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR). (Another, smaller party – the *Partai Sosialis Malaysia*, PSM – was however kept at an arm's length as some of the leaders of the *Pakatan* coalition were not too comfortable with having to work with an obviously left-leaning secular party that had as its logo the red clenched fist.) The *Pakatan* coalition was led by its de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim, though the largest and best-organised party in its ranks was undoubtedly PAS. The fact that PAS was now in a coalition that was led by the same politician who it had accused of being a traitor to the Islamist cause in the 1980s was politely left unmentioned, as was the fact that Anwar had served in the same Mahathir administration that had labelled PAS a party of intolerant fanatics in the past. Forgotten, too, was the DAP's allergy to Islamism and its steadfast refusal in the past to entertain any discussion on an Islamic state – despite the fact that PAS had made many concessions to the non-Malays in the country, that ranged from the construction of a Chinese-style mosque in the state of Kelantan to their repeated assertion that PAS would not object to a non-Malay becoming the Prime Minister of Malaysia, as long as the person was a devout Muslim. What really united the disparate assembly of parties was the simple and pragmatic aim of defeating the UMNO-led BN government at the elections, and capturing the state.

In the lead-up to the elections of 2008, PAS's attack on the UMNO-led government was particularly sophisticated, which reflected the extent to which the Islamist party had developed to become an increasingly complex entity. PAS's critique of the Badawi administration came on two fronts: On religious grounds it attacked the UMNO party and its leaders for what it regarded as their flawed understanding of Islam. Badawi's *Islam Hadari* project was cast as an innovation that had no precedent in Islamic thought or history. The *Islam Hadari* project was meant to serve as a springboard for a more progressive approach to Islam, but it was ridiculed and rejected by

37 Re: Farish A. Noor, Present Developments Among the Christian Communities of Malaysia, Malaysia Update, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, June 2010.

the Islamists for whom *Islam Hadari* was never (and could never be) Islamic enough. On the political front, on the other hand, PAS attacked the Badawi administration for its failure to uphold democracy and to protect the human rights of Malaysians of all races and creeds. By this stage the reformists of PAS were beginning to articulate their concept of an Islamic Welfare State (*Negara Kebajikan Islam*), and reaching out to disgruntled voters who were seeking alternative models of governance. The opposition coalition highlighted the instances of police brutality that were recorded during the closing stages of Badawi's period of leadership, notably the manner in which the police had reacted to the Hindraf demonstrations where hundreds of Hindu protesters were sprayed with water cannons and tear-gassed at close range. With all these issues kept on the boil, and Malaysia's cyberspace teeming with blogs, websites and news sites hostile to the government, Malaysia headed to the polls in March 2008. What happened at the elections would later be described as the first tsunami in Malaysian political history.

The 8 March 2008 Tsunami: The Eclipse of *Islam Hadari* and the Return of PAS

The 12th general elections of Malaysia were held on 8 March 2008, after a campaign that witnessed the highest use of the Internet ever. During the elections of 2004, the number of registered Internet users in Malaysia stood at less than two million, but by 2008, there were more than twelve million registered users in the country – thus making cyberspace a real battleground of ideas.

In the months leading up to the elections, PAS's younger professionals were at the forefront of winning the hearts and minds of young Malaysian voters. While the ulama of the Islamist party continued in their old style of sermonising politics, talking about the evils of corruption and heavenly reward for those who would serve God's cause on earth, the reformist-technocrats of PAS were busily engaged in foregrounding their own vision of a new Malaysia where social and economic justice would be delivered alongside a new kind of moral politics that did not necessarily discriminate against non-Muslims. The latter point was perhaps the most important, for PAS was again allied to the secular DAP party, whose leaders like Lim Kit Siang and Karpal Singh had made it clear that the DAP would never, ever, endorse any attempt to change the Malaysian constitution and turn the country into an Islamic state. As PAS expanded its outreach programmes in order to garner a bigger share of the popular vote, it was now forced to deal with the realities of a multicultural

and multireligious Malaysia where Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs were here to stay. Consequently it was the reformist faction of the party that was allowed to project itself during the campaign, while the more hardline conservative ulama stood quietly in the background.

By then, the reformists of PAS were already being referred to as the 'Erdogans' of the party – a reference to the Turkish Islamist leader Yecip Tayyip Erdogan, leader of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Turkey, and the country's 25th prime minister. Erdogan had been trained as an economist and had his first experience as a politician when he was elected as the mayor of Istanbul. The AKP party that he led was seen by many of the reformists in PAS as an ideal model for the Islamists of Malaysia to emulate, for it had managed to balance the moral economy of Islam with the real demands of governance and statecraft. But Erdogan was not the only Islamist leader that the reformists of PAS looked up to then: Another Islamist leader of considerable standing in their eyes was the Tunisian Rachid Ghannouchi, who had founded the modernist-reformist *Ennahda* movement (*Hizb an-Nahdah*, the Renaissance Party) that was also well on the way towards capturing the state in Tunisia.

Here it should be noted that the moderate reformists of PAS had their own global network of contacts and allies among the more moderate and reform-minded Islamist movements and parties across the world. If the hardline conservatives of PAS regarded the *Jama'at-e Islami* and the *Ikhwan'ul Muslimin* as their compatriots, the reformists of PAS were more inclined to look to other Islamist Democrats such as the *Harakat an-Nahdah* of Tunisia and the *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, AKP) of Turkey as their friends instead. And if there was one thing that the Islamist Democrats were good at, it was experimenting with new tactics, modalities and technologies to serve the Islamist Democratic cause.

Thanks in part to the Internet, and their adroit use of it, the reformists of PAS soon became household names for many Malaysians who had hitherto only been acquainted with the likes of Hadi Awang and Nik Aziz. The reformists included Dr. Dzulkefly Ahmad and Dr. Hatta Ramli – both of whom had joined PAS in the 1980s and 1990s as a result of PAS opening itself up to Muslim intellectuals that was part of the late Yusof Rawa's attempt to forge the alliance of *ulama* and professionals (which we have discussed in chapter 3) – Dr. Kamaruddin Jaafar, who had joined PAS following the fall of Anwar Ibrahim and the internal UMNO crisis of 1997-98, and long-time PAS members like Mohamad Sabu and Husam Musa, who was then rising fast as the blue-eyed boy of Nik Aziz, and tipped to be the future chief minister of Kelantan. Unlike the traditional ulama leaders of PAS who were

less inclined to speak and write in English and were unable to communicate with the rest of Malaysia's plural society, many of these reformists had been educated in England or the United States, and were more than prepared to argue their point in English, Malay as well as Arabic. As a result, they were featured prominently in many of the country's new English-language news sites and blogs, and were able to speak beyond the confines of PAS's traditional Malay-Muslim vote bank. Prior to the elections Husam Musa had even been voted 'Man of the Year' by the news site *Malaysiakini.com*, for his exposes on government corruption and abuse of power.

Aside from the online news sites that had by then marginalised the mainstream press (that was largely owned and controlled directly or indirectly by the parties of the BN), the advent of social media networks such as Facebook was also an important factor that altered the terms of the electoral contest: PAS, like its allies PKR and DAP, had begun to scour the Internet in its plan to widen its support and membership base, and through social networking sites was able to build up a virtual on-line fan base bigger than any other party in the country. Through the Internet PAS was able to circulate its own manifesto for the future, and clarify some of the tenuous issues that had bedeviled the party in the past such as the place of *sharia* law and *hudud* punishments should PAS come to power. Via Facebook and other social networks PAS developed its PAS supporters' club as well as its new network of non-Muslim supporters which were crucial at revamping the image of the party as an Islamist party that did not discriminate against non-Muslims. As the elections drew nearer, PAS announced that it would even field non-Muslim candidates and more female candidates (like Dr. Lo Lo Ghazali) to show that the Islamist party was both women-friendly and capable of catering to the needs of non-Muslim Malaysians.

While adopting the Internet as its own, PAS also embraced the new social movements and lobby groups that appeared on the domestic scene. Apart from Hindraf, another major lobby group that had emerged by then was the NGO-led Coalition for Free and Fair Elections, otherwise known as Bersih. In contrast to Hindraf, which was a Hindu-based movement that served the interests of the Malaysian Hindu community primarily, Bersih was a pan-Malaysian movement that cut across ethnic and religious boundaries as it campaigned on the singular issue of free and fair elections in the country.

The importance of movements like Bersih cannot be underestimated, for in hindsight it can be seen how movements like it had provided the Islamists of PAS with a neutral and inclusive platform where they could campaign alongside their non-Islamist allies as well as a broad section of civil society actors on non-contentious issues that were ethnically and

religiously blind or neutral. PAS and DAP were wary of crossing swords yet again on the thorny issue of the Islamic state or the implementation of *hudud* law, but on Bersih's common platform the reformists of PAS could stand eye-to-eye with their counterparts in PKR and DAP, for all of them wanted to have cleaner and freer elections in the country.

The BN coalition, on the other hand, was hard pressed at the last stages of the electoral campaign. The government's handling of sensitive issues such as freedom of religion and the demolition of Hindu temples meant that the non-Malay component parties of the BN (MCA, MIC and Gerakan) were desperate in trying to shore up non-Malay support for the ruling coalition. Prime Minister Badawi was also being criticised by members of his own UMNO party for having made too many concessions to the other ethnic groups in the country, and for liberalising the public domain too fast and too much. The *Barisan Nasional* was about to pay a heavy price for not being able to defend the coalition's model of inter-ethnic compromise.

As the votes were counted on the evening of 8 March 2008, it was the ruling *Barisan* coalition's turn to be staggered. The polls registered a massive swing in favour of the opposition, with the BN coalition's share of the popular vote dropping from 63.9 to 50.3%, a drop of 13.6%in all. The BN, which had won 198 seats at the last election, had only managed to retain 140 Parliamentary seats and had thus lost its two-thirds majority in Parliament. With the exception of the PBB and PRS parties of East Malaysia, all of the BN parties of the Peninsula had suffered significant and embarrassing losses: MCA's share of Parliamentary seats had dropped by 16, Gerakan by 8 and MIC by 6. But it was UMNO that suffered the most, having its share of Parliamentary seats drop by thirty. Equally significant was the fact that some of the leaders of the BN coalition parties had been defeated at the polls too, such as the MIC president Samy Vellu – the long-time giants of the BN were falling, one by one.

By contrast, the opposition parties had managed to win a victory that was only matched by the opposition's performance at the elections of 1969: The PKR party, that was led by Wan Azizah, scored the highest gains in terms of parliamentary seats, rising from only one to 31. Both PAS and DAP increased their number of parliamentary seats by 16, though it was the DAP that gained more as it had won more seats at the previous election: DAP's number of parliamentary seats rose to 28 while PAS's rose to 23. All in all, the opposition PR coalition had registered a positive swing of 10.6%, winning 46.7% of the popular votes. PR's gains were as stunning as BN's losses. Another important factor was the rise of new, young parliamentarians and state assemblypersons who were still in their political infancy: The victory

of the PR parties brought to the Parliament and state assemblies new faces such as Nurul Izzah Anwar (daughter of Anwar Ibrahim), Tony Pua, Hannah Yeoh and Rafizi Ramli, who would in turn raise the level of discussion in the political arena in the years to come. This younger generation of new Malaysian politicians seemed to reflect the multiethnic, multi-religious and cosmopolitan character of the globalised Malaysia of the day, and compared to them, the older faces that had been seen in Parliament for decades seemed positively Jurassic.

The PR parties had done exceptionally well at the State Assembly elections too, and had won control of five state governments: Kelantan, Kedah, Selangor, Perak and Penang. As analysts looked at the electoral map the day after, they were shocked by what they saw: half of the Malaysian Peninsula had fallen into the hands of the opposition. PAS now had gained control of two state assemblies of its own: Kelantan and Kedah, with Tuan Guru Nik Aziz as the chief minister of Kelantan and PAS Commissioner Azizan Abdul Razak as the chief minister of Kedah. Additionally, the popular PAS leader Mohamad Nizar Jamaludin was made the chief minister of Perak as well.

Though international ratings agencies such as Standard and Poor's and Moody's did not register a negative reaction to the results (Moody's ratings service retained Malaysia's standing at A3), the game was up for the Badawi administration. The prime minister accepted the verdict of the vote and soon after announced his decision to step down as president of UMNO and leader of the BN coalition. With the exit of Badawi, the state-sponsored project of *Islam Hadari* had also met its untimely demise, though this did not signify the eclipse of Islam on the discursive stage of Malaysian society and politics.

At this stage it is important to reflect that Malaysia's politics during the Badawi era of 2004-2008 was marked by two main features: On the one hand, a sustained attempt at re-launching the nation-building project on the basis of a more inclusive and representative national discourse that accepted, and even celebrated, the plural basis of Malaysia's multiethnic society; and on the other hand an equally important battle for the definition of the meaning of Islam in the modern age. As argued earlier, the Badawi administration had attempted to win over the Malay-Muslim electorate by offering another interpretation of Islam that was an alternative to PAS's. Badawi's *Islam Hadari* project highlighted the positive role that Islam had played in the civilisational development of Muslim societies, and like the developmentalist model of Islam that was foregrounded during the Mahathir era it also attempted to demonstrate how Islam could be the basis for a new kind of authentic Muslim modernity that was not entirely based on the Western secular model.

That Islam was once again projected to the foreground of Malaysian politics and society was, of course, to PAS's advantage as it meant that it (Islam) remained at the centre of Malaysian politics and was still the main concern of the Malay-Muslim constituency in the country. In this respect, the Badawi era did not put an end to the Islamisation race in the country, and did not slow down or reverse the penetration of Islamic ideas, symbols and vocabulary into the public domain or the governmental apparatus. If anything, Islam became even more embedded in the state's machinery and was normalised as part of Malaysia's public and governmental discourse for another half a decade. It is crucial to note here that the gradual Islamisation of the Malaysian state apparatus and bureaucracy was therefore *not* the doing of PAS – for it had not gained control of the state – but rather of successive UMNO administrations that had continued to use Islam in its bid to legitimise its rule and discredit its Islamist opponent. For the Islamists of PAS who wished to see Islam integrated as part of the everyday life of Malaysia's population, this could only have been a good thing.

While the state was promoting its brand of Islam via every channel of communication at its disposal, Malaysia was also witnessing the development of what has been called a 'populist' Islam that expressed itself through pop culture, music, the arts, the fashion industry and even consumer products. By 2008 the Malaysian market was awash with Islamic products ranging from 'Islamic' shampoo and toothpaste to 'Islamic' pop music and other forms of entertainment, that were aimed at earning the so-called Muslim dollar. As Muller (2010, 2013, 2014) has argued, this pop Islamist culture was in many ways transnational as well as local, and resonated deeply among the younger Muslims of Malaysia then.[38] And as the market of Islamic consumer alternatives expanded, it would be PAS – rather than UMNO – that stood to gain the most as Islamic symbols and ideas became increasingly normalised, domesticated and familiar.

This was the socio-economic and discursive context in which PAS found itself in the 2004-2008 period, and it was this shift closer to the popular Islamic register that allowed the reformists of PAS to articulate

38 Re: Dominik Muller, An Internationalist National Islamic Struggle? Narratives of 'brothers abroad' in the discursive practices of the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS). In: South East Asia Research, Vol. 18 (4) Special Issue: Islamic Civil Society in Southeast Asia – Localization and Transnationalism in the Ummah, SOAS, London (pp. 757-791) 2010; Post-Islamism or Pop-Islamism? Ethnographic Observations of Muslim Youth Politics in Malaysia, Paideuma, 59.2013, (pp. 261-284) 2013; and *Islam, Politics and Youth in Malaysia: The Pop-Islamist Reinvention of PAS*, Routledge Contemporary Southeast Asia Series, London: Routledge, 2014.

and disseminate their brand of reformist Islam even better, couched as it was in the discourse of Islamist democracy. The 'new' PAS that was being marketed then was one that was in synch with the rapidly changing socio-economic demographics of the country, where a new urban Muslim middle class was emerging; one that harboured upwardly mobile aspirations while also retaining a strong commitment to Muslim values and identity. The extensive development of the countryside from the 1970s to the 2000s meant that by 2008 there were hardly any truly rural areas left in Peninsula Malaysia, and what was once regarded as the rural Malay hinterland had become a semi-rural, semi-urban space that was connected to the urban metropole thanks to new communications technology such as the Internet. Malaysia's Muslim population was no longer made up of rural Malay farmers and peasants, and PAS had transformed itself accordingly to become an urban Islamist party that reached out to the younger generation of ambitious yet pious Malay-Muslims who entertained first world ambitions.

The other crucial development within PAS by 2008 was the ascendancy of the reformist Erdogan faction that had managed to reinvent the party to such an extent that it was able to join the *Pakatan Rakyat* coalition and present itself to the wider Malaysian electorate (including non-Muslims) as a viable alternative to the UMNO-led BN coalition. More so than the conservative ulama who had spooked the country's non-Muslims for decades, it was the Erdogans of PAS who deserved the credit for PAS's gains at the elections of 2008. However PAS's victory brought with it its own train of problems and questions: It was true that PAS had scored well as a result of its new conciliatory attitude towards the other non-Islamist parties of the country, and that it had come one step closer to capturing the state. But the elections of 2008 also demonstrated that PAS could *only* come to power as part of a coalition, and that it could only become a national party if it catered to the interests of the non-Muslims, too. PAS's co-operation with the secular DAP brought both parties closer to the centre of power, but it also meant that PAS was no longer able to pursue its long-held goal of turning Malaysia into an Islamic state. What, then, was the *real* cost of compromise and moderation; and how long could PAS sustain such an inclusive stance before it would be accused of betraying its own Islamist cause? (Something the party had accused other Muslim groups and leaders of doing in the past.) These questions would linger over the next five years as Malaysia prepared itself for the next chapter of Malaysia's convoluted politics, under the leadership of the country's sixth prime minister, Najib Razak.

PAS in the Era of *1Malaysia*: The Internal Divisions Finally Come to the Surface

On 3 April 2009, the post of the prime minister of Malaysia was formally taken up by Dato Sri Mohammad Najib Haji Abdul Razak. Prime Minister Najib was about as UMNO as one could get, being the son of Tun Razak, the second prime minister of Malaysia, and the nephew of Hussein Onn, the third prime minister. His brother, Nazir Razak, was then the head of Bumiputera-Commerce Holdings, and it appeared as if the close relationship between politics and business had grown even closer in the charmed circle of Malaysia's uppermost elite class. In Najib's cabinet were other members of the elite families of UMNO, including Hishamuddin Onn, who was part of the renowned Onn family that founded the UMNO party itself.

Notwithstanding the elite composition of the new UMNO leadership, the Najib administration set out on a rather new path as far as UMNO-led Malaysian politics was concerned. For starters, Najib seemed less inclined to present himself as a religious scholar or man of excessive public piety. Compared to some of the other, more conservative leaders of UMNO, Najib's career had been that of a technocrat's, and he was less disposed to take part in the holier-than-thou polemics that had for so long characterised the competition between UMNO and PAS. Having received his early education at St. Johns Institution, Kuala Lumpur, and later graduated from the University of Nottingham, Najib cut a figure that harked back to the era of Tunku and Tun Razak, when Malay-Muslim leaders were less apologetic about wearing bespoke suits and were quite at ease to discuss matters of state in the comfortable surroundings of the club. Yet Najib was no *dilettante*: He was, in fact, one of the most veteran leaders of UMNO then, and had been in the party since his twenties – and given his first ministerial post at the age of 32. He had served as Minister of Education and Minister of Defence before becoming the Deputy Prime Minister, and was one of the few senior UMNO politicians who had travelled widely and was able to carry himself confidently abroad.

Najib's rise to power came at a time when globalisation had landed upon Malaysia with a thud. The elections of 1999, 2004 and 2008 had shown, progressively, how the communicative infrastructure of the new borderless world had begun to unravel the settled orders of knowledge and power that had been built by the first generation of postcolonial pioneers; and that the older understandings about territoriality, representation, space and authority had all been seriously deconstructed in no uncertain terms. In particular the election campaign of 2008 was a bitter and painful lesson

to the old-school elites that the Malaysian electorate – like the electorate of any other country, worldwide – was no longer beholden to the symbols of traditional power or even the threat of state reprisal. Things that were unimaginable in the past, such as openly flaunting censorship laws, discussing matters pertaining to sex and sexuality in the public domain, or even flagrantly lampooning political leaders via satire and cartoons, had now become commonplace. By then it was also evident that the state's conventional means of communicating with the masses – and projecting symbolic state power – such as the mainstream media, were also redundant. Najib was forced to confront the challenge of governing a Malaysia that was far more complex, more educated, better connected and mobilised than any of his predecessors.

If one were to attempt to locate the ideological subject-position of the Najib administration in relation to the previous administrations before his, one could say that Najib's policies were a combination, or perhaps a compromise, between the policies of Dr. Mahathir and Abdullah Badawi. Dr. Mahathir's period of leadership was one where Malaysia was seen as a country that was fervently supportive of the developing world and opposed to both Western interference in domestic affairs and the manipulations of predatory foreign capital against local economies. This was the period when Malaysia was supportive of the international anti-Apartheid movement and against Israeli aggression in the Arab world. But even then the Malaysian economy was fundamentally a trading economy, and despite the anti-Western rhetoric that was sometimes employed by the country's leaders, Malaysia was for all intents and purposes a market-friendly country and traded extensively with the West. Malaysia's openness to the world was largely maintained throughout the Badawi era, where Malaysia was also dragged into the global 'war on terror' and expected to play its part as a model moderate Muslim state for others to emulate.

As far as Malaysia's foreign policy and economic relations were concerned, there were few radical changes during the Najib era. If anything, the Malaysian economy was opened up and liberalised even further during the opening stages of the Najib administration – via measures such as the government's Economic Transformation Programme (ETP) – that gradually opened up some of the previously protected domains of the economy for foreign capital penetration.

During Najib's time, Malaysia's international economic standing improved further, and by 2010, the country was ranked as the tenth most competitive economy in the world by the International Institute for Management Development (IIMD). In time, Western – and notably American – banking

groups like Goldman Sachs and Citigroup were allowed to operate in Malaysia, adding to the increasingly high level of foreign capital penetration into sectors of the local economy such as banking. Linked to the opening up of the Malaysian economy was the gradual relaxation of protectionist measures and special preferential treatment that had been given to the Malay-Muslim *Bumiputeras* of the country, which dated back to the era of Tun Razak (who was, ironically, Najib's father). Prime Minister Najib, in keeping with the promises of his predecessor, also pursued a programme of governmental transformation, promising to create a state apparatus that was more open, accessible, accountable and responsible to the Malaysian public. (Najib eventually opened his own Facebook account, to have better access to the Malaysian public and to encourage feedback from the public at large.) Of particular interest, however, is the question of *who* the Malaysian public was in the eyes of the Najib administration, and which constituency he was trying to reach out to; his answer was spelled out in the grandest of the projects that were launched during the Najib era, the *1Malaysia* project.

As we have seen earlier, it was former Prime Minister Badawi who first articulated a broader, all-encompassing notion of Malaysian identity that was couched in terms of a universal Malaysian citizenship. A somewhat similar notion underlay the grand *1Malaysia* scheme that was presented by the Najib administration, and in a nutshell the *1Malaysia* idea could be summed up as a desire to build a nation that was united and progressive on the basis of a common vision for all Malaysians. As unifying nation-building narratives go, *1Malaysia* was of the garden variety, and without any potentially controversial points of contention – it sheltered no evident ethno-supremacist overtones and was not exclusively communitarian in any sense of the word. The state's propaganda bumph that promoted the idea of *1Malaysia* emphasised time and again that the aim of the project was to create a developed, modern and progressive Malaysia that was based on standards of excellence, humility, integrity and meritocracy. But it was in the mundane-ness of the *1Malaysia* concept that its novelty stood out in bold relief – for this was the first time, since the Mahathir and Badawi eras – that Islam was not being specifically presented as part of the state's discourse of legitimation.

Though not an ostensibly secular discourse, *1Malaysia* was interesting in the sense that it placed more emphasis on values such as integrity and meritocracy instead, which happened to be universal in scope and blind to ethnic and religious particularities. This may account for how and why it was initially warmly received by a wide section of the Malaysian public, notably among the non-Muslims of Malaysia who had, by then, lived through an

Islamisation race that had lasted more than three decades. Under the rubric of the *1Malaysia* project, a host of state-sponsored ventures and programmes were launched, which ranged from the 1Malaysia Housing Scheme to the 1Malaysia Peoples Financial Aid (*Bantuan Rakyat 1Malaysia*, BR1M). The Najib administration was keen to ensure that the state was at hand to help the urban poor and the young in particular, and many of these state-funded projects were targeted specifically to new urban settlers, young university graduates, first-time house and car buyers, etc. In short, *1Malaysia* was an attempt to plug the leak of the urban youth vote that had sprung during the 2008 election campaign.

Widening the potential appeal of *1Malaysia* among the young even more were the other promises that the Najib administration had made to the Malaysian public; some of which were of an unprecedented nature. To the consternation of the conservatives in his own party, Prime Minister Najib vowed to repeal the Internal Security Act (ISA) that had been the bane of the civil liberties movement in Malaysia since the 1960s. Also to be repealed or amended were the Printing Presses and Publications Act and the Restricted Residence Act; and the government also promised to deliver a new Freedom of Assembly Act that would allow Malaysians to organise rallies with less difficulty. [39]

Faced with a BN government that had opted for a 'softly secular' (or at least not overtly religious) path of nation-building, PAS might have been tempted to play the Islamic card once again, as it did during the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq (2001-2002), the Danish Muhammad cartoon controversy (2005-2006) and throughout its campaign against Badawi's *Islam Hadari* project (2004-2008). But by mid-2008, PAS found itself in a different situation altogether, as part of a broad opposition alliance that put it in the same ranks as the secular DAP and PKR. This would present PAS with a range of new problems that it may not have anticipated when it first agreed to join the coalition earlier.

The outcome of the 2008 elections starkly presented PAS with a tally of facts and figures that simply would not go away; on the positive side, it was undeniable that PAS had made gains and was able to say that it had two state assemblies under its control (Kelantan and Kedah) as well as three chief ministers in its ranks. But on the negative side it was clear that despite being the biggest party (in terms of members and supporters) in the PR coalition it had won the smallest number of Parliamentary seats – 23, compared

39 Moving Democracy Forward, New Straits Times, 16 September 2011; ISA Mansuh: Najib Umumkan Transformasi, Berita Harian, 16 September 2011.

to DAP's 28 and PKR's 31. For PAS, which was also the oldest party in the *Pakatan*, the prospect of coming in third must have been galling at first.

It was then that cracks began to appear among the ranks, and PAS's internal complexity burst out into the public domain for all to see. The gains that the party had made were obviously not enough to placate the demands and concerns of some of the leaders and members of the Islamist party who still clung on to their dream of turning Malaysia into an Islamic state – no matter how distant that goal may be deferred into the hazy future. While for the Malay-centric ethnonationalists in PAS's ranks, the thought of having to share power with the predominantly Malaysian Chinese DAP was a strain on their fragile nerves that proved difficult to bear. In the state of Selangor in particular, the divisions seemed acute: the *Pakatan* had brokered a power-sharing arrangement between PKR, DAP and PAS where PKR would dominate the state government while PAS and DAP would share in the spoils. But it was noted by many observers that on the night of their election victory some of the PAS leaders who had won seats in the State Assembly were not even present at the victory gatherings, and were rumoured to be engaged in secret negotiations with UMNO instead. All these divisions – between the Islamist-democrat reformists, the ulama faction and the Malay ethno-nationalist faction – would continue to simmer until it finally came to the boil a year later, at the PAS General Assembly of 2009.

While the *Pakatan's* de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim was on a tour across Europe, PAS held its general assembly on 4-6 June 2009, in Shah Alam, Selangor – a state that was now under the control of the *Pakatan Rakyat*. In the lead-up to the general assembly, the Malaysian political scene was rife with speculation about an internal leadership crisis and the possibility of a *putsch* for the leadership of PAS.[40]

Fueling the speculation were the reports in the mainstream press about an internal struggle in PAS, between the reformists of the Erdogan faction and the conservatives of the ulama camp. The latter were said to include the party's own president, Hadi Awang, as well as a number of prominent leaders such as Nasharuddin Mat Isa, Hasan Ali, Mustafa Ali and the members of the party's *Dewan Ulama* and *Shura* Council. The mainstream media was also playing up the theme of Malay unity, and encouraging PAS to consider the possibility of merging or at least co-operating with UMNO for the sake of defending the Malay position in the country. (PAS's own publications

40 Farish A. Noor, The PAS 55Th General Assembly, Shah Alam, Selangor, 4-6 June 2009. RSIS Malaysia Update, June 2009. Nanyang Technical University, Singapore, June 2009.

such as *Harakah* and *Siasah* were, in turn, engaged in a sustained attack against some of the leaders of PAS who were then suspected of propounding such ideas.)

The 2009 general assembly was perhaps one of the most closely observed of PAS's assemblies, and coming as it did at a time when PAS's commitment to the opposition coalition was in doubt almost every aspect of the assembly was scrutinised in detail. Observers noted that the president's opening speech included an attack on UMNO as a party that was corrupt, worldly and un-Islamic – themes that had become ingrained in PAS's discourse for more than half a century by then. This seemed to signal that PAS was not about to join with UMNO any time soon. But it was also noted that the assembly had as its theme the slogan 'Islam leading the process of Change' (*Islam Memimpin Perubahan*), which suggested that it was Islam that would be the real game-changer in Malaysian politics, *and not democracy*. It was also noted in the president's speech that the references to PAS's allies PKR and DAP were in passing, and both parties were described as fellow travellers on PAS's long road to its appointed destiny. [41]

Tempers rose, with some PAS leaders like Husam Musa and Haron Din openly accusing each other of betraying the party, and at the assembly an open contest for the posts of deputy president and vice president was held. The most interesting contest was between Husam Musa – who was seen as a reformer – and Nasharuddin Mat Isa – who was by then widely regarded as belonging to the pro-Malay-unity camp. Complicating matters was the last-minute entry of Mohamad Sabu, another member of the Erdogan camp, into the race; which led to a three-cornered fight leaving Nasharuddin victorious by a margin of 199 votes. It is also interesting to note that at the assembly many of the PAS leaders from Kelantan were defeated by other PAS leaders from other states, such as Kedah, Perak and Selangor – which also suggested that PAS had developed to become a more national party by then, with a stronger presence outside Kelantan, its home base since the 1960s.

Later during the closing stages of the assembly it was the Selangor division of PAS that issued the most controversial proposal of all, calling

41 I was present throughout the assembly as an academic observer, and had raised the question of how and why the president's speech had placed such an emphasis on Islam (rather than democratisation). My PAS contacts informed me that the speech was revised and re-edited several times, up to the very last day before it was sent to the printers. Some of those in the progressive faction of the party had contributed to the document, especially in areas such as social welfare and democratisation. However I was informed that positive references to pluralism, multiculturalism and co-operation with the Pakatan were later removed or downplayed by Hadi Awang himself and his group of internal personal advisors.

for the investigation and possible banning of the Muslim feminist NGO *Sisters in Islam*. That PAS could even contemplate doing such a thing was mind-boggling to say the least; the party had managed to win the support and trust of a wider Malaysian public thanks to its stated commitment to democracy and to play by the rules of the democratic game. By calling for the banning of a feminist NGO – that happened to be one of the most visible NGOs in Malaysia's public domain – it seemed as if PAS was reneging on its promise to abide by the rules after all. PAS leaders we interviewed then suggested that the call to ban *Sisters in Islam* was really an act of internal sabotage that was intended to embarrass and discredit the reformist Erdogans who had worked so hard to expand PAS's support base in the urban areas and among the non-Muslims of the country.[42]

The 2009 PAS assembly was a game changer in PAS's own internal politics as it led to the marginalisation of the modernist-reformists of the party, and the momentary return of the Ulama faction instead. Furthermore, the developments within PAS were now fully displayed to a wider Malaysian public that was avidly following the developments within the party, as PAS

42 The proposal to investigate and possibly ban Sisters in Islam was in fact forwarded by the PAS Women's branch of the Selangor state division of PAS (Shah Alam wing) and was passed without debate. This was because there are two categories of motions filed at the general assemblies of PAS, those to be debated and those that are not debated (Usul-usul tidak dibahaskan). The proposal came under the second category. It was later revealed that the PAS leader Khalid Samad had asked for the proposal to be watered down, to simply register PAS's rejection of the work done by SIS. Informants told us that similar proposals against SIS and other progressive Muslim thinkers in the country were regularly put forward every year, but were always rejected and have never made it to the general assembly. The question therefore arose as to how and why this proposal was passed this time round, and why it was not edited and watered down as requested. The immediate impact of the proposal was a strong reaction from SIS and other NGOs in Malaysia's civil society space. It also elicited a response from MCA, Gerakan and the two other component parties of Pakatan, PKR and DAP. DAP's secretary general, Lit Kit Siang, reacted by calling the proposal 'ridiculous' and 'contradictory', while both DAP and PKR issued separate statements the next day. In our interviews with insiders of the party we were informed that there was talk of an attempt to sabotage the general assembly and that the passing of the proposal was intended to serve the purpose of embarrassing the progressive wing of PAS and to apply pressure on the joint leadership of the Pakatan. One of the PAS Executive Committee members I spoke to informed me that: "In fact what people don't know is that every year we have had similar proposals to ban SIS, and to take them to court or even Shariah court. But we have always been able to stop it at the last minute because one of us will vet the document and tell them (the division representatives) that 'this is not necessary now because we have bigger issues to deal with'. This year we don't know what happened, but somehow the proposal got through. So now that it is out, we (PAS) are officially committed to this, and we cannot retract it. So this is a big disappointment for us (reformists), because it looks very bad and the public will think that we were being hypocritical. They will say that the party is really full of fanatics and that the liberals are a minority and cannot control the extremists any more".

had opened itself up to public scrutiny as a result of its own engagement with the public via the Internet. The alternative cyber-media were present to report the daily developments of the assembly, as were bloggers, foreign observers as well as scholars and analysts. For the moderates of the Erdogan faction, the outcome of the assembly was a potential disaster for the party and its image, for it was they who had opened up PAS to the Malaysian electorate as a whole via their engagement in cyberspace. And the reformists realised that if the Malaysian public could 'like' PAS on Facebook, it was also able to 'unlike' the party whenever it was seen to waver on its democratic commitments.

That some of the more senior leaders of PAS – like Hadi Awang, Mustafa Ali, Hasan Ali and Nasharuddin Mat Isa – could openly talk about reconciliation with UMNO in the name of Malay unity then is something that has to be understood in the context of Malaysia's internal interethnic politics at the time. The elections of 2008 had brought into power a generation of younger Malaysian politicians of a more cosmopolitan background, but it also led to the rise of the DAP which was now in control of Penang and rather dominant in Perak. The DAP, which for so long was seen as a Malaysian Chinese-dominated party and which was regarded by some to be a communitarian party to boot, was presented in the mainstream press as a potential fifth column that was a threat to the position of the Malay-Muslims in the country. In the press and in some of the more conservative blogs and websites of the country, the DAP's gains in Penang was seen as part of an elaborate long-term strategy to ensure Malaysian Chinese dominance in parts of Malaysia where they were a majority; notably in urban settlements such as Georgetown, Ipoh, Taiping and some other cities on the west coast of the Peninsula. The fact that the DAP then had no Malay leaders of note among its leading ranks – despite its claims to be a non-communitarian left-leaning secular party – merely reinforced the view held by some that it was really the Trojan horse for an eventual Malaysian-Chinese takeover of the country.

For the more conservative ethno-nationalist elements of Malay society at the time, a sense of communal panic and anxiety had set in, reminiscent of the communitarian sentiments that held sway among many Malays in the 1970s. But UMNO under Prime Minister Najib was then embarking on a national reconciliation programme that came in the form of his *1Malaysia* project. For the more stalwart defenders of the Malay-Muslim position, the time seemed right for the creation of a Malay-Muslim bloc that would defend the Malay position even if UMNO was no longer inclined to do so: By then the country was witness to the rise of a new sort of

communal-based public activism and social networking, that came in the form of a range of new ethno-nationalist NGOs and lobby groups that were making their entry into the public domain. These included the Malay-Muslim ethno-nationalist NGO and lobby group *Perkasa* that was formed in 2009 and led by the independent member of Parliament Ibrahim Ali; who in 1987 was among those detained under the Internal Security Act. In 2008 Ali won his Parliamentary seat as an independent candidate (ironically with the support of PAS) though since assuming his post as member of Parliament had been advocating the defence of Malay rights and privileges as stated in the Malaysian Federal constitution. Critics of Ibrahim Ali noted that despite his populist discourse the group he led had received the open support of former Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who had likewise criticised the Najib administration for its reformist ambitions. *Perkasa* was granted a publications permit for its newspaper *Suara Perkasa*, while opposition members of Parliament pointed out repeatedly that the discourse of *Perkasa* starkly contradicted the inclusive discourse of Najib's *1Malaysia* project; though the latter had been hamstrung and unable to contain or control the growth of *Perkasa* and its communalist demands.[43]

That *Perkasa* and the other groups allied to it could have appeared in Malaysia then was symptomatic of the wider context of geo-political and geo-economic changes that were impacting on Malaysia at the time: While Malaysia's economic standing was indeed improving, this was also a result of the liberalising drive that was being spearheaded by the Najib administration. On the table were other long-term economic challenges that Malaysia would have to weather sooner or later, that included its eventual acceptance of free trade agreements with the United States, China and the forces of global capital. International investors were pleased to note that the Najib administration had relaxed some of the restrictions on foreign capital penetration; and were equally pleased to see that the affirmative action policies that had benefited the Malays were slowly being eased out. This may have registered positive scores among the international business community, but it was also greeted with alarm by conservative Malay politicians, technocrats and businessmen who feared that their place and standing in the Malaysian political economy was being jeopardised.

43 'A Small Chip of the Opposition Bloc', TheMalaysianInsider.com, 8 July 2010.

The post-2008 period was therefore a time when Malay communal anxiety began to rise again, in proportion to the success of the DAP and the penetration of foreign capital into the country. It is important to note that on many occasions those who articulated these concerns were not necessarily from the poorer agricultural class, but rather among the urban-based Malay-Muslims from the middle classes instead. The Malay-Muslim students of UITM (MARA Technological University) of Shah Alam, for instance, publicly defended their right as Malay-Muslim *Bumiputeras* to be given privileged access to education.[44] In the southern state of Johor, local Malay community leaders expressed their worry that Malaysia's improving ties with Singapore meant that more and more Singaporean capital would be invested in the state in order to create a commercial and residential property market that would be beyond the pockets of ordinary Malays. In the state of Perak, local Malay leaders lamented the fact that the DAP-dominated State Assembly had given out land grants to Chinese Perakians, and spoke of the Malays being driven out of their own homeland. While Malaysia's economic performance was gradually improving – with more foreign capital regarding the country an attractive destination to park themselves – it seemed that the rush for the economic pie was also intensifying, and turning into a communal contest too.

The divisions in PAS at the time reflected the wider divisions that were beginning to appear among the members of the Malay-Muslim community. While there were those who were prone to accepting the theory of an inevitable racial contest in the country, there were also many Malay-Muslims who seemed inclined to the view that the lot of the Malays was something that had been politically manipulated and engineered. In July 2010 a survey conducted by the local Merdeka Research Centre found that the Malay community was split over whether affirmative action should continue and if they actually benefited enough from government programmes. The poll also found a majority of Malays surveyed – 70% – felt that corruption among the community's leaders was the main threat to the Malay/Bumi-

44 The MARA Technological University began as the MARA Institute of Technology and was upgraded to university status in 1967. It was, by then, the home for more than 170,000 students and had a network of 9 campuses, 12 affiliated campuses and 21 affiliated colleges. The origins of MARA date back to the time of Tan Sri Arshad Ayub, who had established the Peoples' Trust Council (Majlis Amanah Rakyat, MARA) as a means of promoting and developing scientific, entrepreneurial and leadership skills among the Malay-Muslim Bumiputeras; and MARA was seen as one of the government's state-sponsored agencies that were primarily responsible for the uplifting of the economic and political status of the Malays in Malaysia.

putera political position as opposed to 'demands made by other races in the country.' The Merdeka Centre survey showed that the Malays were equally split on government assistance programmes with 45% of them believing that they only helped the rich and politically connected, and about 48% of the Malays surveyed believed that such programmes had benefited the ordinary public.[45]

The bifurcated nature of the Malay-Muslim community – by now the biggest vote bank in the country and the 'natural constituency' of both PAS and UMNO – accounts for how and why both PAS and UMNO's discourses had also grown increasingly complex by the 2010s. It was clear that both the Najib administration and the reformist Erdogan faction within PAS were targeting the new urbanised Malays who were assumed to be more concerned about issues such as democratisation, transparency and accountability in governance. But at the same time – though the rural sector was diminishing in size and political importance – it has to be noted that there were still more than seventy predominantly Malay-Muslim semi-rural constituencies in the Peninsula where issues such as the protection of Malay rights were regarded as relevant to many. While trying to reach out to as many Malaysians in general and Malay-Muslims in particular, both PAS and UMNO would be stretching the limits of their discourses to the maximum.

This was the reason why PAS's rhetoric during the first Najib administration seemed a peculiarly varied one to many outside observers: On the one hand the leaders of the party were wont to raise issues related to democracy, human rights and social justice at the numerous forums and public talks they organised. On the other hand, however, the very same party that was calling for freedom of speech was seen attempting to restrict such freedoms for others. In the state of Selangor, where PAS was sharing power with PKR and DAP for instance, the state's religious authorities had begun to limit the freedoms of minority groups such as the Qadiani Ahmadis – who remain, in the eyes of many orthodox Muslims the world over, a cult movement that cannot be called Muslim in the first place. The small Ahmadi community based in Kampung Nahkoda, Selangor, had raised their concern about how

45 Poll shows divided Malays, Themalaysianinsider.com, 9 July 2010.

they were being labelled as non-Muslims, and their mosque was regarded as a non-Muslim house of worship.[46]

And while the Erdogans of PAS were attempting to polish the Islamist party's image for the benefit of the international media, some of the more conservative leaders of their party were inclined to take up causes that would earn PAS international publicity, but of the less flattering kind: PAS leaders like Khalid Abdul Samad and Youth Wing leader Nashrudin Hassan Tantawi took up a swathe of moral campaigns that ranged from the banning of casinos to the evils of massage parlours to the vice of alcoholism and smoking. In 2011 PAS's Youth Wing were incensed to learn that Malaysia was about to play host to the popular singer Elton John, who was set to perform at the Genting Highlands resort on 22 November. Despite having been knighted, it was evident that the Islamists of PAS were not impressed by Sir Elton's title or his music: *Harakah Daily's* chairman Shahril Azman al-Hafiz and other PAS leaders like Khalid Samad and Nashrudin Tantawi highlighted the fact that Elton John was openly in a relationship with a man,

46 The Qadiani Ahmadis – followers of the Muslim thinker Ghulam Mirza Ahmad of Qadian – have been in Malaysia for decades but their presence has always been a controversial one. Shortly after Malaya gained her independence in 1957, the small Qadiani settlement in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur, found themselves surrounded by Malay-Muslim settlers who demanded that they be evicted on the grounds that they were not Muslims, and as such not entitled to live in an area reserved for Malay settlement. In 1959 the newly independent Malayan government under the first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman tried to settle the dispute by awarding the Qadianis eight new lots of land in a hitherto unused and undeveloped area around Kampung Nakhoda, Selangor. It was in 1963 that the Qadianis were relocated there and their first mosque set up. The Qadianis in Sabah, East Malaysia, were comparatively luckier and in 1967 their community was registered as an organisation under the name of the 'Tahrik-i-Jadid Ahmadiyya Muslim Association of Sabah'. By the 1970s, the conditions faced by the Qadianis in Malaysia grew progressively worse. Following the banning of the Qadianis in Pakistan, the Qadianis of Malaysia tried to get themselves registered. Their leader Maulana Saeed Ansari attempted to formally register the movement several times from 1970 to 1971, but all requests for formal legal protection were denied. Instead in April 1975 the Malaysian fatwa committee of the National Council for Islamic Affairs in Malaysia under the chairmanship of the then Prime Minister Tun Razak declared the Ahmadis to be 'non-Muslim' and 'outside Islam'. In June the meetings of the Rulers' Council voted in favour of the same stance and in 1976 the Islamic Affaris Council of the Federal Territory issued a fatwa declaring that Qadianis were 'not Muslims'. The final blow came in 1977 with the 11 April gazette (notification P.U.(B) 279 11 April 1977) which declared that 'The Ahmadi-Qadiani teaching invented by Mizra Ghulam Ahmad is not from Islamic teaching. Thus a person who follows this teaching is not a Muslim'. As a result the Qadianis were effectively legally non-Muslim, though this judgement posed a peculiar problem for the Qadiani Malays who – according to the Malaysian Federal Constitution's stipulation which stated that all Malays are by definition Muslims – were oddly enough no longer Malay as well. In 1984 the same rulings were applied in other parts of the country and as a result the Tahrik-i-Jadid Ahmadiyya Muslim Association of Sabah was subsequently deregistered too.

and that his music could promote homosexuality too. (To which Norman Halim, chairman of the Recording Industry Association of Malaysia, replied: 'These are just narrow-minded people trying to impose their values on everybody. You don't go to an Elton John concert and suddenly become gay![47]) Though PAS was successful in their first attempt to prevent Elton John performing in Malaysia, the knighted pop star did manage to return the following year, and did finally perform in November 2012. Then again, PAS's anti-pop brigade went into full swing to denounce the singer who was known for hits such as *Don't Go Breaking My Heart* – though Malaysian pop lovers were relieved to learn that the show would go on this time round (and there were no reports of mass conversions to homosexuality afterwards).[48]

Admittedly, some of the causes that were taken up by some PAS leaders earned the Islamist party the guffaws and sniggers that it deserved; but it also has to be remembered that other PAS leaders at the time were engaged in matters of a more serious nature. Dr. Lo Lo Ghazali for instance was one of the few female PAS leaders who had raised the issue of the welfare of single mothers and abandoned children, which resonated better with the overall theme of the Islamic welfare state that was then being developed by the likes of Dr. Dzulkefly Ahmad, Dr. Hatta Ramli and Mujahid Rawa. And for the Erdogan faction of PAS, then, the real question that had to be addressed was how to transform PAS into an Islamist-democratic party that could win the support of a wider public on broad-based non-sectarian issues such as anti-corruption and transparency in governance instead.

The importance of the reformist agenda was made clearer by developments abroad when the Islamists of Egypt had finally come to power after months of unrest and turmoil following the fall of President Hosni Mubarak that was the result of the 'Arab Spring' of 2010. On 21 February 2011, the Egyptian *Ikhwan'ul Muslimin* announced that it would create its own party, the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP), to be led by senior *Ikhwan* leaders such as Mohamed Morsi, Saad el-Khatatni, Essam el-Erian and Hussein Ibrahim. The presidency of the party was given to Morsi, who would lead the party at the elections the year after. On 24 June 2012 elections were held in Egypt and the FJP managed to win 51.7% of the votes, bringing them to power.

After struggling for more than eight decades, the *Ikhwan* was suddenly faced with the predicament of an all-too-sudden entry into the corridors of power. The Freedom and Justice Party entered Parliament alongside the party of the Egyptian Salafis who had hitherto avoided direct political entanglement,

47 'Elton John Concert Protests Come under Fire', The Daily Chili, 26 October 2011.

48 'Malaysia's Islamic Party Protests against Elton John Concert', The Guardian, 30 November 2012.

but who were now represented by their own Nour (Light) party. But in the coming months President Morsi would alienate vast sections of Egyptian society, including Coptic Christians, Westernised elites, secular Leftists and old-school nationalists. The new constitution that the FJP would push through would be rejected by the non-Muslim and secular-leftist groups of the country, who would instead accuse the president and his party of trying to *'Ikhwanise'* the whole country. Though Morsi would try to normalise relations with the West, some of his policy decisions – such as accepting an IMF loan with interest – would anger his own Islamists followers too. Even his attempts to normalise relations with Iran – which led to the first arrival of Iranian-Shia tourists to Egypt – would ultimately upset some Sunni conservatives, for whom Shias were simply beyond the pale of the Muslim community.[49] Though the euphoria of the moment was at an all-time high, few would be able to foresee that in less than a year's time, Morsi and the FJP would be rejected by the very same Egyptian people they claimed to represent, and the president would be deposed by the army led by the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces.

As PAS upped the stakes in the political race in the country, and intensified its co-operation with its political allies in the *Pakatan Rakyat* as well as NGOs in the civil society movement, the Najib administration was also facing challenges of its own. Prime Minister Najib had come to power – like his predecessor Badawi – without having won an electoral mandate. Badawi had later won an overwhelming victory at the elections of 2004, but lost all that he had gained by 2008. The Najib administration was likewise expected to prove itself at the polls, and speculation grew that elections might be held in 2011, then 2012, though nothing happened.

There were two challenges that the Najib administration was faced with: the first was the evident decline in the popularity and credibility of the non-Malay parties of the ruling *Barisan Nasional*, that had been soundly beaten at the elections of 2008. As we have seen earlier, in 2008 the MCA, MIC and Gerakan were all badly mauled at the polls and some of the leaders of these parties had been unseated as well. Four years on, the non-Malay parties of the BN had not been able to register a significant increase in support from their respective ethnic communities that have been their long-term vote bases, and it was not certain if any of the non-Malay parties of the BN would be able to stage a comeback anytime soon. The prospect of a further decline in non-Malay/non-Muslim support for the BN was a daunting one, as it entailed the possibility of a less ethnically representative government that would make a mockery out of Prime Minister Najib's inclusive *1Malaysia* project.

49 Yasmine Fathi, Egypt's Islamist Project on the Brink, al-Ahram, 5 July 2013.

The second problem was found within the ranks of the Prime Minister's own party, where numerous corruption scandals had been uncovered and brought to the public's attention. The scandals dated back to the time when Prime Minister Najib had been the minister of defence in the country, and related to allegations of kick-backs that were paid and received by the various parties involved in the purchase of two Scorpène-class submarines from France that were intended for the Royal Malaysian Navy. It was alleged by the opposition that advisors close to Najib were involved in the deal, and related to this were other grisly reports of the murder of a Mongolian female translator, Altantuya Shaaribuu, who was said to be one of the go-betweens in the transaction.

While having to fend off allegations of high-level corruption in arms deals, the government was also forced to deal with another case of alleged high-profile corruption that related to the National Feedlot Corporation (NFC), that had been set up as a commercial enterprise with governmental support in order to address Malaysia's need to increase its own domestic production of beef. The NFC was owned by Agroscience Industries Ltd, and UMNO Minister for Women, Family and Community Development Affairs Datuk Seri Sharizat Abdul Jalil's immediate family members were on its board of directors. Sharizat was then one of the most articulate and visible female leaders of UMNO, though the Feedlot scandal incurred an enormous cost to her own reputation and her standing in the party. The Auditor General's report pointed out that the NFC was in a mess; and it was noted that the corporation had been given more than two hundred million Ringgit (RM) to start up a major agricultural production venture that would increase the number of cows bred in the country. By 2012, however, opposition leaders argued that in the interim some of the money had been used to buy property in Kuala Lumpur and Singapore instead. The fact that on the board of directors of the NFC were the members of Sharizat's own family merely gave the opposition the opportunity it was looking for to press home the charge that despite all the talk of transparency and accountability, the Najib administration dealt leniently with those in high office who had been caught with their fingers in the till. The NFC 'cow scandal' clung around the neck of the administration for months on end, and proved to be more troublesome than a sticky albatross.[50]

By 2013, it was clear that time was running out for the Najib administration for the elections had to be held by the third quarter of the year. However, by that stage it remained uncertain if the non-Malay parties of the BN would

50 'It's a Cow… It's a Condo… It's a Criminal Breach…' In: FinanceTwitter.com,. 15 November 2011; 'Malaysia's UMNO Scandals', The Asian Sentinel, 29 November 2011; 'The National Feedlot Corporation', TheMalaysianInsider.com, 2 November 2012.

be able to recover from their losses, or if the public could be persuaded that the administration was sincere in its reform agenda. Prime Minister Najib was compelled to campaign to the Malaysian public directly and personally, in a style that was dubbed presidential: he toured the country extensively, and visited the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak many times to ensure that the East Malaysian vote bank was secure. In an effort to woo the Malaysian Chinese vote, the prime minister went ahead of himself and made a number of personal appeals to the Malaysian Chinese electorate before, during and after Chinese New Year in early 2013. So eager were the publicists of the BN to regain the support of the Malaysian Chinese that even the South Korean pop star 'Psy' was roped in to perform at the BN's Chinese New Year bash in Penang, where he performed his hit 'Gangnam Style'. (Which, interestingly, happened to be a song that parodied the lifestyle of the rich.) But if it was a hit that the Malaysian public expected, an even bigger one was about to land on the coast of the East Malaysian state of Sabah – and it would raise the spectre of a violent, unreconstructed form of primordialism in the middle of a Southeast Asia that was rapidly globalising.

The Return of the Repressed: The Sabah 'Sulu Crisis' and Its Impact on Malaysia

As the Najib administration prepared itself for the upcoming elections, news arrived of an unwelcomed landing on the east coast of Sabah: on 11 February 2013 armed intruders, said to number in the hundreds, had landed near Lahad Datu and brazenly stated that they had returned to their ancestral homeland, which they claimed as theirs. As news of the incursion spread, Malaysians in both East and West Malaysia were unclear as to what had really happened and how to react.

It has to be noted that Sabah has always experienced the coming and going of seafarers from nearby Philippines and Indonesia, and that the state had a relaxed maritime law that allowed for barter trade along the coastal zones – a reminder of its own maritime past and the fluidity of sea lanes and borders in that part of Southeast Asia. This time, however, the visitors had clearly not come to trade but to claim instead, bearing with them flags and banners that proclaimed that they were the followers of the sultan of Sulu, Sultan Jamalul Kiram III. Coming as it did so close to the upcoming elections in both Malaysia and the Philippines, this was one

instance of radical contingency interrupting the settled present that neither government appreciated.[51]

The Sabah incursion raised questions that were both political and epistemic in nature. It emerged rather early on in the crisis that there was simply no adequate vocabulary to describe what had happened. During the first week of the incursion, the Malaysian authorities were still unable to decide whether the intruders were visitors or insurgents, and whether this was an invasion in the first place. Compounding matters was the lack of information on the ground, as both the local and international media were not allowed to get too close to the landing site where the intruders had dug in.

The opposition parties took to the crisis like ducks to water, and revelled in the opportunity to show how the Najib administration had failed to rise to the occasion. PAS demanded that a special sitting be called in Parliament so that the government could decide on what steps to take to expel the invaders, but to no avail. In the meantime the handling of the matter fell into the hands of the then-minister of home affairs, Hishamuddin Onn – who

51 The Sulu incursion into the East Malaysian state of Sabah was one of the most complex issues of recent years, which sorely tested the bilateral relations between Malaysia and the Philippines. Its origins date back to the pre-colonial era, before Sabah was taken over by the British North Borneo company and turned into the colony of British North Borneo. The Sultanate of Brunei had 'gifted' parts of the east coast of Sabah to the Sultanate of Sulu as a reward for Sulu's assistance to Brunei during an uprising against the latter. As a result of this the Sultanate of Sulu exercised some control over the area until the arrival of the British, Dutch and Spanish colonial powers had effectively cut up the region into separate colonies. When Malaysia was created in 1963 the remnants of the Sulu royal family once again raised the question of their overlordship over that part of Sabah, which was the basis to the Philippines' claim on the state. The matter was never fully resolved, even after the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1967. Complicating matters further was the fact that the Philippines is officially a republic, that does not recognise the legal standing of Sulu as a separate kingdom within the republican framework of the country. Despite the fact that the Sultanate of Sulu does not have the status of a sovereign state, both Philippine and Malaysian authorities have dealt with the members of the royal family and afforded them token recognition. Malaysia, however, had consistently maintained that Sabah is a part of Malaysia and has never recognised the claims of the Sulu Sultanate on any part of the state. During the crisis, the administration of President Aquino of the Philippines was placed under heavy pressure by his opponents to take sides with the Sulu Sultan's claims, and to offer support to Sultan Jamalul Kiram III. But the Philippine government was more concerned about what the armed incursion would do to the image of the Philippines, which had been associated with both terrorism and piracy in recent years. During his Presidential address at the peak of the crisis, President Aquino noted that under the terms of the Philippine constitution no Filipino citizen is allowed to bear arms without a permit, to organise a militia unit that is not recognised as part of the Philippine state's security forces, or to unilaterally declare war on another country. On those terms, the incursion by the followers of Sultan Jamalul Kiram was illegal, and there was the suggestion that he and his men would be taken in for questioning.

happened to be the cousin of the prime minister. As the crisis escalated and stories emerged of Malaysian soldiers being brutally killed by the insurgents in ambushes, Malaysian public opinion turned accordingly bellicose and uncompromising. After a delay of weeks, the Malaysian security forces were finally authorised to attack and flush out the Sulu invaders, but by then, the image of the prime minister and home minister had already been compromised. Najib had missed his 'Falklands moment', as noted by the analyst Wong Chin Huat:

> It really depends on whether Sabahan and Malaysian voters will accept a Johnny-come-lately Margaret Thatcher in Datuk Seri Najib Razak. When the Falkland Islands were invaded by the Argentineans on 2 April 1982 in an undeclared war, an emergency Parliament meeting was convened. Thatcher rallied her Parliament and the nation to start a campaign which saw the British triumph in 74 days. Looking like another determined and brave war leader after Winston Churchill, Mrs Thatcher won the nickname "Iron Lady". In contrast, Najib let his ministers handle the crisis while he went on his election campaigns, showing little sense of urgency. No emergency Parliament sitting has been convened despite calls from the opposition and the public to do so to enable national deliberation and resolution. Instead, the home minister made unimaginably appeasing remarks, saying that the intruders where neither terrorists nor militants. [52]

It ought to be noted at this stage that despite the criticisms that emanated from the opposition benches in Parliament, the handling of the Sabah incursion was a good example of intra-ASEAN diplomacy; though popular sentiments in both countries grew increasingly hostile and angry (photos and effigies of both leaders were set alight at numerous demonstrations in Manila), neither the Malaysian nor Philippine government allowed the crisis to get out of hand, and there was evident co-operation between the two states. But coming so close to the anticipated election date, the Lahad Datu incursion was perhaps the last straw that broke the momentum of the campaign. By then, the Najib administration was faced with internal opposition coming from the ranks of his own party, a BN coalition that was unable to garner enough support for the MCA, MIC and Gerakan, and an unfriendly public domain that was more active than ever before. The ad-

52 Wong Chin Huat, Lahad Datu – How Might Malaysians Vote?, TheNutGraph.com. 11 March 2013.

ministration had attempted to address the demands that had been made by the NGOs and broad-based civil society movements in the country, notably the Bersih campaign for free and fair elections. The Election Commission announced that indelible ink would be used during the coming elections, to ensure that voters would not be able to cheat and vote more than once. But these changes came perhaps a tad too late for the BN coalition to regain their standing in the eyes of the Malaysian electorate. Issues such as the Scorpene and NFC corruption scandals remained unresolved in the eyes of many (despite the resignation of Minister Sharizat who was most closely associated with the latter).

By the time the date for the 13th Malaysian general elections was announced, the parties of the *Pakatan Rakyat* were ready. The DAP had attempted to improve its image by elevating a number of prominent non-Chinese members to its higher ranks, including younger aspiring politicians like Zairil Khir Johari, who was in fact from the family of the former UMNO politician Khir Johari. (Also to join the DAP was a small number of ex-UMNO/BN politicians, who took the opportunity to denounce the party they used to belong to as soon as they left it.) Sensitive to the fact that it had been accused time and again of being a communitarian party that catered primarily to Malaysian Chinese interests, the DAP's make-over was intended to shed the image of it being a racially-exclusive party.

But it was PAS that was the most adept when it came to representing itself to the increasingly complex Malaysian electorate. From the early 2000s to 2013, PAS's ranks had been bolstered by the entry of members of more complex backgrounds. The party that was once associated with the rural Malay peasantry and village preachers was now made up of a wide array of Muslim members from all walks of life. As Muller (2013) has noted, PAS by then was able to rally to its side a myriad of new social actors and agents ranging from TV presenters, soap opera actors, former models, both rock and *nasheed* musicians, young Internet designers and bloggers, etc. The party had created a virtual parallel economy in terms of its merchandising alone; at the party's rallies and public forums, one could purchase a cornucopia of PAS-related products ranging from keychains, hats, scarves, T-shirts, posters, mineral water, videos, tapes, DVDs and even party-endorsed cosmetic products. PAS had produced a video entitled *'Oley! hudud Allah!'* that promoted *shariah* law and *hudud* punishments featuring the leader of its Youth Wing Ustaz Tantawi brandishing an electric guitar, of all things. Popular preachers like Ustaz Azhar Idrus, Malay actors like Bob Lokman, singers like Man John and even the winner of Malaysia's *Fantasy Academy* (*Akademi Fantasia*) pop

icon show Mawi had openly joined and supported PAS by then, and were openly campaigning up and down the country alongside old-time PAS veteran ulama like Hadi Awang and Nik Aziz[53] – and it seemed that the only celebrity missing was Elton John.

The singular snag faced by the opposition then was their inability to agree on the allocation of seats in the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. After the incursion into Sabah earlier in the year, Sabahans in particular had grown increasingly frustrated by the mishandling of their affairs; and this gave local Sabahan parties such as the *Parti Maju Sabah* (SAPP) the opportunity to revive their call for a more locally-oriented politics along the slogan of *'Sabah for Sabahans'*. Though the parties of the opposition PR attempted to contest in most of the seats in East Malaysia, they were summarily denounced by local Sabah parties such as SAPP as being no different from the other West Malaysian parties of the BN. But PAS was less perturbed by this development as it had always maintained its focus on the Malaysian Peninsula in any case.

The climax of the campaign arrived on 5 May 2013 when the 13th general elections of Malaysia were held. The two-week campaign witnessed both the best and the worst of Malaysian politics. In the constituency of Temerloh, Pahang, the UMNO candidate Saifuddin Abdullah conducted one of the most gentlemanly campaigns of all, where both he and his PAS adversary had promised not to slander, abuse or obstruct each other. Elsewhere, however, the tone and tenor of the campaign veered from the personal to the hyper-patriotic and nationalist. The opposition were accused of being stooges of the West, of betraying the national interest and of not supporting the Malaysian armed forces during the Sabah incursion. In turn, the opposition accused the Najib administration of corruption, abuse of power, sheltering and protecting corrupt officials and not doing enough to contain the hyper-communalist discourse of right-wing Malay ethno-nationalist groups like *Perkasa*.

It is interesting to note that this was one of the few election campaigns in recent Malaysian history where Islam was not such a visible election issue; though many of the more prominent leaders of PAS – particularly among the Erdogan faction – were accused of being *Shias* or under the influence of Shia ideology. (In the course of my interviews with Salahudin Ayub and Dzulkefly Ahmad I was shown leaflets and banners that had been distributed in their constituencies, claiming that they were closet supporters of Shia Iran.) But PAS was eager to engage with its nemesis

53 Muller, 2013, pp. 272-273.

UMNO, and many of the PAS leaders openly challenged their UMNO competitors to open debates. (Among them was Hatta Ramli, whose challenge was not met, and who jokingly told me that he was thus forced to debate with himself; concluding that 'I have defeated myself with a good argument'.[54])

Another noteworthy aspect of the campaign was the manner in which the three main parties of the opposition coalition had come to rely and depend on one another. The DAP and PAS had attempted to make in-roads in the southern state of Johor that had always been regarded as the bastion of UMNO. At most of the rallies organised in Johor, the Malaysian Chinese supporters of the DAP were seen carrying flags, banners and posters of PAS as well. In the course of my fieldwork in Johor during the election campaign (25 April-5 May), I noted that PAS and DAP members were co-operating closely, organising rallies and public forums together, and collecting donations from a wide range of local donors who included both Malays and Chinese. It was estimated that a vote swing of more than 85 per cent among the Malaysian Chinese voters would have delivered the Parliament into the hands of the opposition then. That the DAP and PAS were working together in Johor is particularly striking to the historian, for as noted earlier, it was in Johor that several PAS leaders had denounced the Malaysian Chinese community in toto after the 1999 elections.

In the end, the long-awaited victory of PAS did not materialise, though the opposition as a whole did make very significant gains: A significant swing of 4.12% was made in favour of the opposition, earning the PR 50.8% of the popular vote nationwide. PAS had contested in 73 parliamentary seats and 236 state assembly seats, and had fielded its candidates in all states across the Malaysian Federation. But as expected, the *Barisan Nasional* did manage to hold on to power, though with evident losses among the non-Malay parties of the ruling coalition. The MCA's share of parliamentary seats dropped to 7, while Gerakan's dropped to 1. The MIC managed to gain 4 parliamentary seats. In total the BN won 133 parliamentary seats, and thus registered a drop not only in popular votes but also parliamentary representation. It seemed as if all the effort that had been put into the *1Malaysia* project had come to naught.

But PAS's leaders and members were not entirely happy with the results they received either. PAS's long winter of discontent had not turned into a glorious summer, after all – for although the PR coalition

54 Interview with Mohd Hatta Ramli, 3 May 2013.

had increased its number of parliamentary seats from 82 to 89, it was PAS that suffered the highest net loss. PAS won 1,633,199 (14.7%) of the total votes cast, but its share of parliamentary seats had dropped from 23 to 21. Significantly, some of the PAS leaders associated with the Erdogan faction had also failed to retain their parliamentary and state assembly seats, despite their evident popularity on the internet and their visibility in cyberspace. Mohamad Sabu had lost at Pendang, Husam Musa had lost at Putrajaya, Salahudin Ayub had lost at Pulai and Nusajaya, and Dzulkefly Ahmad had lost at Kuala Selangor.[55] (In fact, the only known moderate reformer who won was Khalid Samad who retained his seat at Shah Alam.)

Leading by a length was the DAP, whose share of parliamentary seats had increased from 28 to 38, after having won 15.7% of the popular vote. (The leaders of the MCA subsequently announced that they would not be part of the next BN government, and set about addressing the internal weaknesses within the Malaysian-Chinese party instead. In the meantime however, it became apparent that most of the Malaysian-Chinese faces in Parliament would be found on the opposition benches, polarising the country further.) Most glaring of all was the obvious fact that for the second time in a row, PAS – which was still the oldest and biggest opposition party in the country – had failed to take the lead in the race to power; and to add salt to the wounds of the Islamists, PAS came in third after DAP and PKR this time around.

Overnight it became obvious to all that the political landscape of Malaysia had shifted visibly, and perhaps permanently. The mainstream press commenced its doleful threnody, with headlines that questioned the loyalty of Malaysian Chinese to the country. The very next day a visibly browbeaten Prime Minister Najib announced that he accepted the results, but also described the 2013 election as a *'Chinese Tsunami'*. With the MCA and Gerakan in tatters, it appeared as if an overwhelming majority of Malaysian Chinese Parliamentarians were now on the opposition bench, polarising the country even further.

Beyond Malaysia's shores, other interesting developments were also taking place in the month of May: in Pakistan, the May 2013 elections led to the victory of Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N), which garnered 125 parliamentary seats. But the real surprise came in the form of the meteoric rise of a new party, the *Pakistan Tehrik-e Insaf* (PTI),

55 Amin Iskandar, Another Son-In-Law Rises, this time in PAS, TheMalaysianInsider.com, 27 July 2013.

which was led by the former celebrity cricketer Imran Khan. Although Khan's PTI came third after the PML-N and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) in terms of parliamentary seats won, it did manage to win the second highest number of popular votes (and 27 seats in the bargain). The sudden rise of the PTI was itself an indicator of how Pakistani society had changed over the past few decades: Pakistan was now a country that was one-third urban, with an urbanisation rate of 3%per annum that made it the fastest urbanising country in South and Central Asia; with a projected urbanisation ratio of 50% by 2025. Imran Khan had excited and inspired a new generation of urban Pakistani voters who were part of the country's new middle class, many of whom had been educated in the West and who were tired of the old style of politics in the country, dominated as it was by the Muslim League and the PPP for ages. At the elections of May 2013, the main issues were no longer ethnicity or religion, but rather corruption, development and real-life concerns such as foreign investment, urban housing and distribution of water. So evident was this shift to a new issue-based and people-centric register that during the campaign period even conservative religious leaders such as Fazlur Rehman, head of the *ulama*-based *Jamiat'ul Ulama-e Islam* (JUI) party argued that the real challenges faced by Pakistan today were corruption and the lack of basic amenities in the cities.

Endnote, Though Not Endgame: PAS in the Future

> What, then, does the future portend for Muslims in cities? Islamism will remain ubiquitous in everyday urban life because globalization, state withdrawal and rising urban inequality create a social milieu ideally suited for the efflorescence of Islamist civil society groups … Islamism could hardly ask for a better midwife than the policy of global neo-liberalism. Far more flexible and pragmatic than imagined, Islamism becomes normalized by its success in meeting the needs of urban Muslims.
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> Paul Lubeck and Bryana Britts, *Muslim Civil Society in Urban Public Spaces: Globalisation, Discursive Shifts and Social Movements*.[56]

56 Paul Lubeck and Bryana Britts, Muslim Civil Society in Urban Public Spaces: Globalisation, Discursive Shifts and Social Movements, in J. Eade and C. Mele (Eds.), *Urban Studies: Comparatory and Future Perspectives*, London: Blackwell, 2001, p. 59.

To state that PAS is at a crossroads in its history today would be to fall into the trap of repeating age-old homilies, for any party, at any given moment, would also be caught in a historical moment. The choices that PAS has made in the past have likewise been historical ones, for even the most mundane of choices would invariably have a lasting effect in the time to come. That PAS is now confronted with a new socio-political reality in Malaysia that may prompt it to make choices that would determine its future form and outlook is thus a pedestrian observation at best.

What can be said, however, is that the election results of 2013 have brought to the fore the myriad of contending voices, worldviews and subject positions that have always been present in Malaysian society, but which now present themselves in close focus. That the interethnic compromise which once served as the basis of the *Barisan Nasional* is now in crisis is painfully clear for all to see, as are the deep internal divisions that belie the instrumental coalition that is the *Pakatan Rakyat*. Evident, too, is the simple mathematical impossibility of any single party gaining total control of the governmental apparatus and winning the state in Malaysia, as is the patent need to develop an inclusive and broad discourse of nation-building that can bring the diverse communities of the country closer together.

With this as the backdrop to the stage of contemporary Malaysian politics, PAS, with history behind it and ample examples to choose from, can go in a number of directions. The calls for Malay-Muslim unity remain resonant, and it also emanates from within its ranks, coming from the likes of PAS leaders like Nasharuddin Mat Isa and Hasan Ali. At the same time there remain the conservative elements in the party led by the likes of Zaharuddin Muhammad (son-in-law to Hadi Awang), Nasrudin Hasan and Nik Mohammad Abduh who hold the view that PAS's cooperation with the Pakatan has cost it dearly, and has brought it no closer to the goal of state capture. Then there are the reformist Erdogans who believe, still, that the democratic path is the mandatory one to follow, and that sooner or later, PAS will have to address the challenge of Modernity and its multifarious demands. All three streams of thought are evident in PAS today, and this accounts for how and why the party speaks in so many tongues; while the reformists of the party continue to labour the idea of the Islamic welfare state, there are still the conservative voices who articulate a vision of Islam that stops short at the frontier of personal morals and sartorial norms – In July 2013, the PAS (female) member of Parliament Siti Zailah Mohd Yusoff called for rules on how women should dress in public, for she argued that short skirts and tight trousers were indecent, and may be the reason why

women get raped.[57] In the same month, another PAS leader, Nik Mohamad Abduh (son of spiritual leader Nik Aziz), said in Parliament that PAS should consider working with the UMNO/BN government to curb the conversion of Muslims by liberals, secularists and the dreaded LGBT community, too.[58] While the *Pakatan* opposition alliance continues in its efforts to call for a recount of the votes and to dispute the results of the 2013 election, these internal divisions within PAS have not and will not go away.[59]

Despite the bluster of Malaysia's convoluted post-election politics, PAS has remained adamant that it would stay in the *Pakatan Rakyat* alliance and soldier on. The Malaysian Islamlists' experiment with democratic Islamism was far from over, however, and by July 2013, events on the other side of the planet would prove just how brittle the democratic compromise could be. On 4 July, as Americans celebrated their independence day, Belgium's King Albert II announced his abdication. On the same day, a less dignified exit was made when Egypt's President Morsi was forced out of power by the Egyptian army which declared that it was responding to the popular will of the masses who had been demonstrating against the *Ikhwan*-led government that took over in October the previous year.

For the leaders and members of PAS, the fall of Morsi was a bitter blow to their own democratic aspirations. Former President Mubarak was deposed after 18 days of protests and rioting, but President Morsi was forced out of power after only 72 hours of protests. As the international media circulated images from the streets of Cairo, with thousands of demonstrators carrying placards calling for Morsi to 'Get Out', it appeared as if the victory of the *Ikhwan* was short-lived after all. Morsi's supporters protested, in vain, and noted that it had taken the *Ikhwan* 80 years to finally capture the state in Egypt, only to lose it after 10 months in power. PAS leaders I spoke to bluntly condemned the army's move as a blatant coup, and noted that the Western

57 'PAS MP Seeks Female Dress Code to curb crime', Malaysiakini.com, 10 July 2013

58 'Guard Against Pressure on Conversion, LGBT, says PAS MP', TheMalaysianInsider.com, 4 July 2013

59 Among the complaints lodged by the opposition parties was the claim that the indelible ink that was used during the elections to mark the fingers of voters was not indelible after all. It was later revealed that the businessman who supplied the ink had no expertise in the matter. (Re: Who Is Mohamed Salleh, TheMalaysianInsider.com, 17 July 2013.) Though PKR strategist Rafizi Ramli conceded that the opposition's failure to sweep the polls was due to "the fears of Malays on security and confidence in a multi-racial country and their livelihood in the rural areas. These are the issues that BN has been able to capitalise on successfully, to create a fear of Pakatan Rakyat". (Re: 'Rafizi planning ahead for the next big battle', TheMalaysianInsider.com, 17 July 2013.)

powers were 'utterly hypocritical' in allowing such a takeover to take place.[60] PAS's Nik Aziz defended President Morsi, who he insisted 'had won in a legal election, and not due to electoral fraud' – a barbed statement alluding to PAS's own allegations of fraud during the recent elections in the country.[61] Despite the anger and frustration displayed by PAS members themselves, it was obvious that the Islamists of Malaysia were in no position to offer any assistance to their Islamists comrades thousands of miles away.

The fall of Morsi and the FJP had a profound impact upon the members of other Islamist parties all over the world, and PAS was no exception. It raised a difficult question that they were now forced to address: the moderate Islamists of PAS had advocated the turn towards democratic participation and an engagement with the discourse of popular democracy, on the basis that Islamism could only succeed if it could tap into the popular will of the masses and present itself as a genuine political alternative that could be chosen through the ballot box. In the words of PAS leader Hatta Ramli:

> Islamists are now in a bind. Though they were a little late in adopting democracy as a means to come to power, they eventually took it up wholeheartedly. But now they have been punished in a way that leaves many of them disillusioned. [62]

Although Morsi had won the popular vote in the Egyptian elections, he and his party had been deposed by the army, ostensibly at the behest of the masses. And if this could have happened to the FJP, then could it not also happen to all other Islamist parties across the world, like PAS in Malaysia, the PKS in Indonesia, the *Jama'at-e Islami* in Pakistan and Bangladesh, and the Islamists in Turkey? And if that were the case, then what was the real human and political cost of the democratic compromise? The *Ikhwan* had been criticised by the more hardline Islamist groups in Egypt for 'selling out' and creating their political wing the FJP. PAS was likewise criticised by groups like the *Hizb'ut Tahrir Malaysia* (HTM) for playing the democratic game and abiding by rules not of their own making. It seemed as if the entire democratic process was a sham, and that despite the apparent openness of democracy's door, there was still no way that an Islamist party could ever capture the state through the democratic process. And to add to PAS's sor-

60 Interview with Mohd Hatta Ramli, Dzulkefly Ahmad and Mujahid Rawa, 4 July 2013.

61 'Nik Aziz Backs Deposed Morsi, says People Power will bring him back', TheMalaysianInsider, 4 July 2013.

62 Interview with Mohd Hatta Ramli, 5 July 2013.

rows, in Bangladesh the former leader of the Bangladeshi *Jama'at-e Islami*, Ghulam Azam, was also being put on trial for alleged war crimes that he was accused of committing during the Pakistan civil war of the 1970s. One by one, it seemed as if the Islamist movements of the world were being checkmated, via either constitutional or extra-constitutional means.

Though PAS's advance seemed to have stalled momentarily, across the entire Southeast Asian region a new normality had set in; in July 2013, Myanmar's President Thein Sein declared that all political prisoners would soon be released, and that the government had signed a peace deal with the Wa rebels. In Thailand a new peace agreement had been made with the rebels in the south; while in Southern Philippines, the MILF had finally agreed to the peace accord with Manila on the condition that the Moros of the south would henceforth be given the lion's share of the revenues gained from mining and rural development.

Southeast Asia, which in the 1960s was regarded as the 'second front' in the global war on Communism, and which was labelled the 'second front in the war on terror' in the 2000s, had apparently quietened down, and the political parties and movements of the region were engaged in the more mundane routine of governance. In Malaysia, too, the blustery rhetoric of the past seemed forgotten, and few could recall the days when the Islamist party of Malaysia had denounced the ruling party in government as the *Hizbulshaitan* – the Party of the Devil. Gone were the slogans that professed their brotherhood to the *Taliban*, gone were the posters of the *Ayatollah*, and gone was the generation that revered the likes of Sukarno and Gamel Nasser. The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS has settled to a new norm of its own, working (sometimes closely, sometimes at odds) with its coalition partners as it cautiously inches forward in its long march towards capturing the state. In the process of doing so it will have to deal with matters both complicated and trivial, challenging and pedestrian, but PAS has finally come home. And its home is *politics*.

5 Religion, Politics, Islam, Islamism

What PAS *Is*, and What It *Is Not*

There are those who would build the Temple,
And those who prefer the Temple should not be built.
In the days of Nehemiah the Prophet,
There was no exception to the general rule.
In Shushan the palace, in the month of Nisan,
He served the wine to the king Artaxerxes,
And he grieved for the broken city, Jerusalem;
And the king gave him leave to depart
That he might be able to rebuild the city.
T. S. Eliot,*Choruses from the Rock,* IV (1934)

PAS and the Lure of All-Devouring Politics

> No civilisation, whether Islamic or un-Islamic, that views life from a universal standpoint and possesses a comprehensive system of administering the worldly affairs, can resist the urge for power in order that it may change the social life of all its subjects after its own pattern. Without the power to enforce, it is meaningless to believe in or present a doctrine as a way of life.[1]
> Ab'ul Al'aa Maudoodi, *Tajdid-o Ihya-i Din*

> Today the ulama have become convinced that through missionary activity alone we will never be able to bring about political change. *We need power.* In fact we have known for a long time now that we need power.[2]
> Ustaz Badrul Amin Bahrom,*Tradisi Diktator Menakutkan Rakyat* (1999)
> (Italics mine)

It is, and has been, the contention of this author that the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party has *always* been a *political* party. And if we are to look at PAS as a political party then so must our analysis and understanding of the party be configured by the terms and concepts of political science, rather than other disciplines such as theology or philosophy. This does not

1 Ab'ul Al'aa Maudoodi, *Tajdid-o-Ihya-i-Din,* 1st edition, 1940, republished: Petaling Jaya: The Other Press, 1999, p. 15.
2 Badrul Amin Bahrom, '*Tradisi Diktator Menakutkan Rakyat*', in Detik, 15 August 1999, p. 43.

entail an all-out blanket denial of the validity of political history, political sociology or political anthropology – indeed such approaches have also been incorporated in this study – but it does mean giving priority to the fundamentally political nature of PAS and its behaviour.

It was from that viewpoint – political science – that my study of PAS has been conducted, and I have tried to account for how and why thousands of Malaysian Muslims have chosen to create, develop and join a political party that seeks to capture the state in the name of Islam. This, I contend, has more to do with other ambitions and wants that exceed the economy of personal piety and Godliness. After all, if the aim of Muslims is simply to live a Muslim life, then it can be argued (and it has) that political parties are not necessary at all. Throughout Muslim history there have been trends and streams of thought that have veered towards that conclusion, as evidenced by the ideas and lifestyle models presented by generations of Muslim Sufi mystics, spiritual brotherhoods and even latter-day lay missionary movements such as the *Tablighi Jama'at* (Noor, 2012) that have self-consciously distanced themselves from the world of politics and political contestation. One does not have to join a stamp collectors' club to become a bona fide stamp collector, and by extension it can be argued that one does not have to join an Islamist party to become a better Muslim. So why Islamism, and why PAS?

The stated goal of PAS has been to capture the state, and after doing so, to turn the state into an Islamic state. On this count, at least even the most ardent critics of PAS will have to concede that PAS has never been hypocritical in its long-term objective, and to PAS's credit its goal of creating an Islamic state in Malaysia has never been cached from public view, as if it was some hidden time-bomb waiting to be detonated upon an unsuspecting public. From the day PAS was formed, in November 1951, the long-term goal of creating an Islamic state in Malaysia has been the beacon that has driven successive generations of PAS leaders and members ever forward. What *has* changed is the meaning and content of the signifier 'Islamic state', and in my recounting of the history of PAS I have also noted how that pivotal concept has evolved over time, according to circumstances and variables that have not always been under PAS's control.

The changing nature of the Islamic state, as it has been developed and articulated in the discourse of PAS, demonstrates the argument of linguists that all signs are fundamentally diachronic and polysemic; what the Islamic state has meant has differed according to time and place, and has depended to a large extent upon the meanings that have been brought to bear upon it by different ideologues of the party. What the Islamic state meant in the 1960s differed greatly from what was meant in the 1980s, which in turn is

different from what is meant today. This *slippage of signification* should not be misread as something nefarious or crafty, for it happens to be the condition of possibility for signification, or meaning, to get off the ground in the first place; and happens to be a mundane and ordinary characteristic of all signifiers in general. What *has* complicated the process of defining the Islamic state, in the case of PAS's deployment of the term, has been the manner in which the signifier has not only been contested by different enunciators and articulators within the ranks of the party, but also the opponents of PAS who have likewise claimed the right to define what Islam is and means in the present day. This, as we have shown, was the catalyst to what I have termed the *'Islamisation race'* in Malaysia, and it is a process that will continue as long as both PAS and UMNO do not relent in their ambition to be the main political party that represents and defends Muslim interests in the country.

The Islamic state, as an *idea* that has been framed by successive generations of PAS ideologues, has always therefore been an idea, and in this regard, the idea of the Islamic state cannot be divorced from the *ideology* that has nursed it. But being an idea does not mean that the Islamic state is and has been something superfluous, airy, ethereal and out of touch with reality. In our analysis we have tried to show how this idea has always been supported by the political-economic-institutional structure of the Malaysian state and its surroundings, and that it has in turn been delimited and shaped by that material reality as well. Like Mannheim (1936) we take the view that if we were to confine our understanding of ideologies to the analysis of individual thinkers and mental processes, and regard them as the only possible bearer of ideologies, then we can never grasp in totality the structure of the intellectual world belonging to a social group in any given historical situation.[3] The idea of the Islamic state is not – in our opinion – a case of *falsches Bewusstsein* laced with sprinklings of homely piety.

Mannheim was correct to note that the 'world' of the ideologue – as a 'world' complete in itself – exists only in relation to a knowing mind (and a political one at that) which in turn shapes the form in which that world appears. The starting point may be *'the distrust and suspicion which men everywhere evidence towards their adversaries'* whereby they begin to realise that something is not right, that the sedimented accounting of the world-as-is is amiss, and that the world does not have to be the way it is. At that stage, the world is suddenly seen and conceived as a structural unity, and no mere plurality of disparate, unconnected and contingent events. This was certainly the case when the ideologues

3 Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1936, pp. 53-55.

of PAS in the 1960s looked at the postcolonial global order as an order that was unequal, unjust and most importantly, challengeable and changeable. The same sense of rupture and an opening of the horizon of possibility was occasioned by the Iranian revolution, which led PAS – and countless other Islamist parties and movements worldwide – to challenge the prevailing global status quo and to regard it as a system that was fundamentally evil, corrupt and to be opposed and altered. The same can be said about how PAS sees the world today, and how it believes that the state of affairs in the country of its birth is one that is likewise manufactured, engineered and thus liable to be re-engineered at the hands of the Islamist-democrat.

This partly answers the question of how PAS, as an Islamist party, differs from so many other Muslim movements and organisations, and from millions of ordinary pedestrian Muslims, who are content to just get on with their daily lives and face the humdrum challenges of living in the present world as it is. PAS does not simply seek to insinuate itself into that world, but to *change* it as well. Living as we do in an age where one no longer gets one's hair *cut*, but rather *styled* – the inflation of senseless signifiers continues, despite the conservatism of grammarians – it is nonetheless vital to note that the labels *'Islamism'* and *'Islamist party'* do denote something particular, and deserving of our understanding.

And if changing the world is what PAS is all about, then in that regard – despite its failure to capture the state on its own, in its entirety – the Islamist party has certainly succeeded. Like many other Islamist parties the world over, such as the *Jama'at-e Islami,* the *Jamiat'ul Ulame-e Islam,* the *Ikhwan'ul Muslimin,* the *Partai Keadilan Sejahtera,* et al., PAS has been able to shift the centre of gravity of Malaysia's public political domain to the Islamist register. Simply by upping the stakes in the holier-than-thou contestation between itself and its adversaries, it has compelled its opponents to enter its preferred discursive domain – Islam – and fight on its ground. And by doing so PAS, like so many other oppositional Islamist parties and movements, has been able to lure its secular-nationalist nemesis off its secular-nationalist perch. (Proof that opposition movements can indeed frame debates and issues even before they actually come to capturing the state and the means of production of public discourse.)

Having said that, it ought to be noted in this conclusion that most of the changes we have seen in Malaysia – from the rise of the parallel religious bureaucracy to the increasingly narrow limits to public discourse on matters religious – have really been the result of the policies and positions taken by the UMNO-led government, that has been in possession of the Malaysian state apparatus since the formation of the Federation of Malaya in 1957. Owing to

the fact that PAS has never succeeded in capturing the state at the level of the federal government, it was UMNO – partly in response to PAS's Islamist challenge and partly in its own commitment to the religion it professes to defend – that has truly created the parallel Islamic bureaucracy in Malaysia today. While some local and foreign analysts, observers and media pundits have held the view that the ascendancy of PAS would lead to the Islamisation of the Malaysian state apparatus, few have cared to point out the obvious fact that such an Islamic leviathan already exists in Malaysia, and that it was the parallel religious bureaucracy of the country that has largely been responsible for the censorship and banning of books, films, videos and music, the enforcement of religious regulations and by-laws, the micro-management of the lives of Muslim citizens and the normalisation of Muslim values, symbols and ideas in the public domain. Even if PAS were to come to power in the country one day, it would discover that it has had its work cut out for it, and that all that is left for PAS to do would be to add the final touches to what has become an already-Islamised Malaysia. PAS would not even have to censor or ban books of contention, as most of them have already been banned by the state anyway. This, then, is the supreme irony of the Islamisation race between PAS and UMNO, and how by offering piecemeal and gradualist concessions to the Islamists in order to hold back the ride of radical Islamism, the latter has actually goaded PAS towards its goal. One is reminded of the story of how Montezuma, when trying to fend off the incursions of the Spanish led by Cortez, sent to his enemies gifts of gold to appease them – and by doing so drove the Spanish gold seekers ever forward instead.

The *Understanding-that-Kills*: Knowing the Islamic State

> Columbus's failure to recognise the diversity of languages permits him, when he confronts a foreign tongue, only two possible forms of behaviour: to acknowledge it as a language but to refuse to believe that it is different; or to acknowledge its difference but to refuse to admit it is a language.[4]
>
> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America* (1984)

If Islamisation is now here to stay in Malaysia, we then have to address the next question: Is an Islamic state necessarily a thing to be loathed and feared? Since the Iranian revolution of 1979, the assumption held by

4 Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America*, New York: Harpers Collins, 1984p. 30.

scores of analysts and politicians alike is that *any* religious state would lead to disaster. It cannot be denied that the human cost of the Iranian revolution was high by any standards, and the price that was paid was a heavy one indeed. The Iranian model – which had inspired Islamist parties and movements the world over, including PAS – was also one that spread terror and panic in the corridors of power in many a Western state and other secular Muslim regimes as well. But PAS today is presented with a range of other alternative Islamist models to emulate and learn from, as the Islamists' experiment with Islamist democracy continues.

Two main arguments have been marshalled against the project of the Islamists: that Islamism invariably leads to authoritarianism and dictatorship, and that Islamism is essentially populist and majoritarian in nature, paving the way for a dangerous form of populist majoritarian politics where minorities – including ethnic, religious and gender minorities – will ultimately be drowned by the overwhelming tide of majoritarian group-think and consensus.

Notwithstanding the vast body of evidence that supports the view that all forms of religio-politics are necessarily sectarian, communitarian and often violent and repressive – one only has to scour the headlines of the news on a daily basis to unearth reports of violence done in the name of God, be it by right-wing Hindu politicians and activists in India, Buddhist communitarian leaders in Myanmar/Burma and Sri Lanka, and Islamist movements across the Muslim world – we must nevertheless attempt to get to the root of the conundrum here: What, precisely, is at fault – religion, or politics, or the combination of the two?

We raise this point at this stage in order to avoid the pitfall of shoddy stereotyping and over-generalisation, for it cannot be doubted that in the wake of 11 September 2001 there has been much pseudo-analysis done on Islam, and much of it has tended to present the problem of political violence in the Muslim world in near-pathological terms, as if Islam itself was at fault. Yet as we have noted earlier, there are millions upon millions of Muslims (and Christians, and Hindus, and Buddhists) for whom the political path is not necessarily the one to be taken; and for whom an attachment – and defence – of religion and religiosity is related to other concerns such as the maintenance of a sense of identity, belonging and place in the world. We also cannot discount the fact that despite the charms of Modernity, there remain billions of people in the world today who continue to live in a God-centred world where the sacred is something real, and worth defending. The massive demonstrations in Paris against the legalisation of marriages between homosexuals was not simply an instance of repressed

primordialism suddenly ripping through the paper-thin veneer of French secularism; but can be seen as an assertion on the part of Catholics for whom the institution of marriage remains a sacred one, meant for particular individuals and couples, and which remains a holy pact that is part of the covenant with God. Likewise Hindu activists who protest against the discourteous use of the image of the God Ganesh on consumer products from T-shirts to rubber sandals are saying to the world that this particular signifier has a sacred meaning to them, and ought not to be trivialised as such. The sacred is therefore something real for such people, and though one would never be able to produce half a kilogram of sacredness to demonstrate its existence, we ought to think of the *idea* of sacredness as something that is tangible, felt and shared, and which exists in a manner akin to Frege's notion of 'logical objects' such as numbers.

The Islamic state has likewise *become* a sacred or sacralised logical object in the ideology of Islamists, and it is something that is consequently worth struggling and even dying for.[5] Unless and until this understanding is taken on board by those who wish to study the phenomenon of political Islamism, we may not be able to fully grasp the world-knowing, world-perceiving and world-changing scope of Islamism itself.

If there is a concern that ought to be raised by analysts and critics about the future of Islamism – and we contend that there is – it has to take off from the abovementioned premise. In our recounting of the history of PAS, we have noted the centrality of the idea of the Islamic state in the discourse of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party. This idea is likely to remain central to PAS's evolution in the future, whichever avatar it may assume later. For PAS cannot abandon its goal of an Islamic state any more than a Socialist party abandon Socialism; as that happens to be the reason for its coming-into-being in the first place.

5 There is an abundant supply of quotations, excerpts of speeches, and documents that have been produced by the ulama leaders of PAS that demonstrates how the concept of the Islamic state was been rendered a sacred concept and part of the faith praxis of Muslims. An example can be found in Ustaz Hadi Awang's tract entitled *Konsep Negara Islam dan Matlamatnya* (*The Concept of the Islamic State and its Objectives*, 1986). In the tract, Hadi argues thus: 'Every Muslim who claims to understand the meaning of the *shahadah* (declaration of faith) must also know that it contains the command to uphold the rule of God on earth, for all of creation must bend to the rule of God.' (Hadi Awang, *Konsep Negara Islam dan Matlamatnya*, Kuala Lumpur: Percetakan Berpadu, 1986, p. 4.

Taking (seriously) into account the goal of the Islamic state, and accepting that it has *become* a sacred quest in the advance of modern postcolonial Islamism today, we are still left with the question of what such a state looks like, how it sees the world, and how the world is to be (re)constructed according to this sacred vision held by the Islamists themselves. This, for me, is the real political question that needs to be addressed, for in the sacred re-telling of the story of humanity and the sacred reconstruction of a new world order, what kind of ordering – political, social, epistemic – of knowledge and power are we likely to see?

Every religion posits the view of a God-centred world where a natural, just order is meant to reign supreme as it mirrors the cosmological order of its adherents. This sacred and/or sacralised order is one that is both particular and internally-differentiated at the same time, as the corpus of sacred knowledge offers the believer a plethora of explanations and justifications as to why the ideal world has to appear as it is. This differentiated ordering of the world is certainly not unique to the Abrahamic faiths alone: Aristotle held that social divisions between masters and slaves were natural, and in Confucianism the distinction between men and women is likewise a division not only predicated on biological differences, but also on uneven and unequal power relations. The Islamists' worldview is no different, and likewise offers a view of the social realm as a place that is ordered while divided, hierarchical and unequal – *The kingdom of heaven is not, after all, a democracy.*

The concerns that have been raised by the rise of Islamism today have more to do with this: That the worldview that has been foregrounded by its proponents is one which sees the present ordering of things as unjust and wanting; and that for justice to prevail on earth it has to mirror the ordering of things in heaven. Though evidently particular in its own perspectivism, this viewpoint sees itself as universal (as most subjective perspectives are wont to do) and admits to no alterity. This inability to accept and to even entertain the possibility of their being other, equally legitimate and real worldviews is the root of the fear of Islamism, I would argue; and it should also be noted that such concerns have been raised before and elsewhere with regards to other totalising discourses and worldviews that likewise have demonstrated their universal claims without being able to take on board the diversity of others. Todorov's (1984) account of the European conquest of America is instructive here, for he notes that during the ill-fated encounter between the conquering Europeans and the native Indians, the former were almost programmed to exterminate and erase the other for they were guided by an *understanding-that-kills*; a worldview that could only see the world from a singular perspective where the other – if and

when he is conceptually apprehended – is immediately consigned to a negative value judgement.[6]

PAS has likewise demonstrated the same propensity towards a totalising grasp of the world where its notion of justice and a just society is one that is hierarchical in nature, and framed according to distinctions that revolve around dialectical oppositions that overlap with moral/value distinctions.[7] When the conservative ulama of the party articulate the view that the world (or rather *their* world) is divided between good Muslims and non-Muslims who are in turn to be divided between domesticated infidels and warring infidels, they are articulating such a worldview that is ordered and rationalised. Likewise when the conservative ulama of the party state that the distinction between men and women is not a distinction between two equal genders, but rather a hierarchical distinction where the rights and duties of men differ from the rights and duties of women, they are also evidencing a worldview that is structured and regulated. 'Justice', in such a context, means something somewhat different from what is often articulated by the secular proponents of a universal justice that equalises; and it is in this enormous gap between the worldview of the Islamists and others that the fear of Islamism dwells.

Over the past six decades, the leaders of PAS have repeatedly reiterated time and again their worldview which is – despite claims to reformism and liberalism sometimes made by some of the spokesmen of the party – a fundamentally hierarchical one where any understanding of Justice has to be located within the context of a worldview that sees human beings and religions as different and thus unequal. As far back as 1986 Ustaz Hadi Awang had already noted that while PAS accepts the reality of a multi-confessional world, it still holds the view that there can only be one truth and one religion that upholds that truth:

> Justice, which has to be upheld in society so as to strengthen the bonds of common humanity and brotherhood among men, preserves the

6 Todorov, p. 127.

7 Hadi (1986) has argued, along with many other PAS leaders, that there can be no such thing as a partial Islamic state or an Islamic state that is built in gradualist terms. In his tract he argues that an Islamic state can only come about via 'a comprehensive (*syumul*) approach, for it has to be understood that Islam is a comprehensive and perfect religion which covers all aspects: of faith, of law, of morals, of governance, of spiritualism and materialism, of individual rights and collective social rights; and without such a comprehensive approach it will certainly fail... We do not deny that there are matters that have to be implemented gradually (*tadaruj*) but the acceptance of the total, comprehensive Islamic state is a precondition that is compulsory (*wajib*); for Islam does not accept partial acceptance, and partial implementation would be a deviation.' (Hadi, 1986, p. 23)

> freedom of religious belief, while still holding that Islam is the one and only true faith.[8]

And if anyone were still deluded as to think that this notion of Justice takes as its starting point the concept of the *essentially* equal universal human subject, Hadi notes that this is simply *not* the case for human beings are *not* the same, and consequently *not* equal, for 'the meaning of Justice is to give each thing its due, according to the laws of Islam'.[9]

Here is where the nominal similarities between PAS and other political parties end; though PAS may now be using the same vocabulary as the other parties of the opposition coalition – citing references to social justice, equity, democracy and human rights – what is meant by these words is often something different. The mistake of some liberal observers is to assume that a similarity of signifiers entails a similarity of worldviews, which is not the case. What I have done in the course of this work is to chart how PAS has, over the past six decades, both adopted and contested the very same signifiers that have been used by the other political parties and movements of the land. From the 1950s to the present, PAS has never vacated the terrain of public discourse, and has in fact contested the meaning of almost all the important master signifiers in the Malaysian public political domain, from signifiers like 'independence' to 'Islam' to 'democracy'.

But as PAS has adapted these signifiers to its own religio-political discourse, it has also sought to give them a different meaning according to its own ideology. Here is where Wittgenstein's notion of discourses as *language-games* comes into play: For he has noted that the meaning of signifiers and their relation to their respective signifieds has less to do with the personal, subjective intentions of individual language-users, and more to do with the rule-governed manner in which such public language games work in the first place. PAS, as a party that brings together more than a million members and supporters, has also developed its own set of linguistic norms that determine the signifying relation between signifiers and signifieds, and within the context of PAS's own rule-governed discourse, words like 'democracy', 'justice', 'Islam' and 'Islamic state' have meanings that are specific to their usage within the party.

And that PAS has a language-game of its own should not strike us as abnormal either, for it is true of all composite mass movements whose

8 Hadi, 1986, p. 18.

9 Ibid, p. 42.

collective group identities are glued together by a common discourse. What 'Socialism' means to left-leaning Socialists and to right-leaning National Socialists is also obviously different, so why should any of us be surprised if PAS's understanding of the signifier 'Justice' means something different to that of the liberals, secularists or nationalists? The onus is upon us to constantly bear in mind that PAS is a party with its own history, identity and goal; and that it speaks a language that needs to be understood by virtue of its particularity.

With this as one of the central kernels of Islamism's worldview, the scholar would be right to ask how such a totalising ideology can ever be reconciled with a Modernity that is pregnant with alterity and replete with diversity. For as Senghass (2002) has noted, because Modernity is in many ways linked to the emancipation process, the growing pluralism of identities and interests, of self-images and worldviews, is its inevitable result.[10] The contrast between the neatly compartmentalised world of the Islamist ideologue and the messiness of Modernity could not be greater, and yet this is the gulf that has to be bridged if the Islamist-democratic is to become a reality. But how?

Between Tidy Universes and Fuzzy Borders

> The desire to expunge contestability from the terms of political enquiry expresses a wish to escape politics.[11]
>
> William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*

> While essentialised Islam is perceived to be monolithic, especially with respect to pointedly fundamentalist positions, the history of Islam (like any other cultural history) has always been characterised by the disputes, controversial opinions in theology and law, even by schisms and often militant antagonisms. Islam from the very beginning has been a multifaceted phenomenon, including explicitly formulated belligerent positions all of which have relied on, and remain reliant upon, justification through the same documents.[12]
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> Dieter Senghass, *The Clash within Civilisations* (2002)

10 Dieter Senghass, *The Clash Within Civilisations,* Routledge/RIPE Series in Global Political Economy, Routledge, London, 2002. p. 116.

11 William Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1974, p. 213.

12 Senghass, 2002, p. 38.

Thus we are naturally compelled to ask the question: Which is the real face of PAS? Is it the 'Erdogan' faction, who have articulated a vision of democratic Islamism that seeks to reconcile democracy with Islam and to take on board serious challenges such as the accommodation of minorities, dealing with the internal differences within and without the Muslim *ummah*, and developing a Muslim Modernity that can deliver social and economic justice on the basis of a new moral politics that goes beyond pastoral care and quaint sermonising? Or is it the ulama faction of PAS, for whom jihad remains a cause to be pursued to the end of the world, and for whom the human race is perpetually divided along the fault-lines of belief, thus permanently relegating the other to the category of the unbeliever? Or is it the Malay-centric ethno-nationalist voice within PAS, that harbours still deep rooted anxieties about the fate of the Malay-Muslims of Malaysia, for whom globalisation, economic liberalisation, urban cosmopolitanism and secular liberalism spell the end of their cherished longing for a nostalgic *Tanah Melayu*/Malay homeland unencumbered by contingency, diversity and ambiguity?

The answer is perhaps all three, for PAS – like every other political party in the world – also happens to be a composite entity made up of a plethora of subjectivities that are bound to be different, and at times at odds with each other. If we do not entertain the spurious notion that all members of the Conservative party or Labour party think alike, then why should we even entertain the idea that an Islamist party would be any different? (Muslims are, after all, not different from anyone else.)

Our remembering of the convoluted and tortuous history of PAS has been intended to demonstrate the fact that from the very beginning of the party's history and right up to the present (and the foreseeable future) these divergent streams of ideas have always been there, lurking within the party as a dissonant chorus of different voices, and are likely to remain. Regardless of how PAS may evolve and adapt to the ever-changing realities of Malaysia's politics (and adapt and evolve it almost certainly will), PAS's complexity will remain a permanent factor that will prevent us from consigning it to simple compartmentalisation and convenient categorisation. PAS is simply too complex a party to be reduced in so cavalier a manner; and that may be a good thing too – for there has already been a glut of such reductivist discourse in the analysis of contemporary Muslim affairs in the post-11 September world we live in.

This complexity also correctly – in my opinion – mirrors the present state of power-relations between the various factions and schools of thought within the Islamist party, which in turn reflects the antagonism between the

same schools of thought that exist in other Islamist movements worldwide too. For while the different schools or approaches to Islamism contend with each other, with none of them being in a position to hegemonise itself and/or silence the others, the Muslim world at large is in a flux as well. The present ideological-theoretical impasse that Islamism finds itself in – yearning to engage with Modernity while also cautious that a hasty embrace may lead to its doom – reflects the Muslim world's own hesitant adoption of Modernity as its own. This engagement, as Salvatore (1999) notes, has been a long and at times painful one as well.[13] Perhaps it would be truer to say that Muslims reside in Modernity, are part of the modern world, but are at the same time wary fellow-travellers at the moment.

Here it is important to note that the current state of debate and reflection that is taking place among Islamists is part of a wider and bigger debate among Muslims in general, who have been dragged into a secular Modernity not of their own making or choosing as a result of the legacy of cultural contact with the West, followed by the experience of colonialism and imperialism. (As we saw in the earlier chapters, PAS's emergence was in many ways a symptom of that newly-arrived Modernity, and a reaction to it as well.) The Christian world has experienced its reformation and age of Enlightenment, while the Jewish diaspora was forced to reflect upon its own scripture as part of its experience of being a dispersed and persecuted minority. After Vatican II, the Church has come to accept that the path to heaven is not solely in the footsteps of Christ, and among Western Jews, there is now the understanding and acceptance that one can be *culturally* Jewish without necessarily having to be a believer. Both these faith communities have been forced to look closely at the textual basis of their own religious identity and hold them up to the light of the modern age. Islam, on the other hand, ascended to political power and dominance almost as soon as it emerged from the Arabian Peninsula, and then experienced a decline of power that has been relentless. As such, Muslims today are confronted by two facts that seem irreconcilable: the abject powerlessness of their political condition, and an epistemology of Empire (to borrow Ebrahim Moosa's term) that sees the world through the lens of an Islamic imperium.

Political Islam today, in so many Muslim countries, is emerging after a long period of authoritarian rule by dictators and autocrats like Suharto, Nasser and Mubarak. After having to live in the netherland of political obscurity for so long, Islamists are suddenly presented with the chance at grabbing the state via the ballot box, but are also encumbered by a political

13 Armando Salvatore, *Islam and the Political Discourse of Modernity*, Ithical Press, 1999.

vocabulary that happens to be a religious one as well. The Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, for instance, had been working underground for eight decades and during that long period its internal cohesion and collective identity was cemented by a common discourse and vocabulary that gave it its sense of purpose and identity too. But that religio-political vocabulary has been defined and guarded by an elite of Hobbesian ulama, for whom power resides – still – in the belly of the leviathan (which presumably will be converted as well). And if that religio-political vocabulary still sees humanity as being fundamentally divided between the *faithful* and the *faithless*, then it would be difficult indeed for such leaders to engage with the realities of a complex society where not everyone believes in the same faith, or the same God, as they do.

Compounding matters is the fact that during such a long period of undemocratic rule – where order and stability was cherished above all else – the state was seen as the tool that could be used to shape society according to the whim of he who controls it. In Mubarak's Egypt, Bourgiba's Tunisia and Suharto's Indonesia, the state was the tool that was used to impose secularism upon the masses at the point of a gun. Islamists who today feel that they now have a chance at commandeering the state likewise see the state as a tool, but a tool that should be used to *Islamise* society instead.

This may explain how and why some attempts by Muslim reformers and modernists to bring Islam into the modern world have been fraught with contradictions and irregularities: on the one hand, Islamist reformers see that human society is complex, and increasingly so. However, on the other hand, Muslim political thought still furnishes them with a polarising vocabulary that divides the world between believers and enemies. We should *never* forget that the elasticity of PAS's rhetoric, and the extent to which it can expand its political praxis, are determined not by the needs of politics but rather the dictates of religion. And even if some PAS leaders might be prepared to go as far as defending freedom of religion and the right of Muslims to choose another faith – as we have seen in the previous chapter – it remains the case that the world of the Islamists is still a God-centred and God-saturated one where Good and Evil exist, and where what is right is forever right, and what is wrong will remain wrong. Liberal optimists would be way off the mark if they seriously believe that even the most reform-minded Islamist can ever declare that which is *haram* as *halal*, such as pork, alcohol or homosexuality. It is not the intention of the Islamist democrats and modernist-reformists that is wanting or at fault, but rather the somewhat constricting and impoverished vocabulary that they have at their disposal; if the only signifiers that can be used to describe the

human community are 'believer' and 'infidel', then it should not come as any surprise if those not party to the Islamist cause find their discourse narrow and worrisome. At this stage in the development of Muslim society worldwide, there are few instances one can cite of Islamist movements that have really begun to see the state as a means to facilitate society coming into its own and/or as a means of guaranteeing the individual the right and the space to be himself or herself instead. (The minimum that is required at this stage, we would argue, is a vocabulary that escapes such narrow dichotomies as 'friend' and 'enemy', and one that does not perpetually frame the other in terms of negation or lack – after all, we do not refer to women as 'non-men'.)

This struggle – to comprehend the import of Modernity, to engage with alterity, to develop a new vocabulary – is precisely what we are seeing in PAS and also many other Islamist movements today. That they are trying to speak of the world anew is telling of the internal struggle that is taking place in their ranks. That some of them revert back to violence and/or negation is indicative of the depth and scale of the problem, and the long train of historical baggage that follows in their wake. But that, one supposes, is why they call it a *struggle*.

The Unending Road: Islamism in a Loop

> Ultimately, for Muslims, Islam is another word for 'Goodness incarnate'. Thus, when Islamists claim that the best government is an Islamic government, here 'Islamic' refers to the incarnation of goodness, so that the claim becomes: the best government is good government. This is a claim that is difficult to refute directly, except by attacking the relation between Islam and the incarnation of goodness. But it is precisely at this point that Islam is strongest, because, for the majority of Muslims, Islam must be the definition of good.[14]
>
> Bobby Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism*

> Realism and flexibility are among the most important features of Islamic methodology.[15]
>
> Rachid Ghannouchi, 'The Participation of Islamists in Non-Islamic Government'

14 Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear*, p. 48.

15 Rachid Ghannouchi, *The Participation of Islamists in Non-Islamic Government*, in Azzam Tamimi (ed.), *Power-Sharing Islam*, London: Liberty for the Muslim World, 1993, p. 59.

In concluding, I would like to address one final question, which is about the future trajectory of PAS.

This historical account of the development of PAS can be read as a *deconstructive* history of the Pan-Malaysian Islamist Party, in the sense that we have tried to demonstrate the *constructiveness* of the thing itself. By retelling the story of PAS, I have also tried to show how the history of PAS has never been a linear or singular history, but rather a myriad of histories that have intertwined and overlapped with one another. There was nothing in the origins of PAS that determined that it would become what it is today, and I am disinclined to offer any sure-footed predictions as to where it will lead itself to in the future. As PAS – that was born in politics – continues to engage in politics, there will always be the attendant possibility that it will be defiled by the thing it wishes to sacralise, as noted by Roy (1994).[16] One thing, however, is certain: that the manifold streams and variants of Islamism that reside within the party will continue to compete with one another, and will rise and fall as they have done in the past, in relation to external variable circumstances that will impact on both PAS and Malaysia.

Another certain observation that can be made here is that the different discourses within PAS will also succeed or fail according to how they resonate with the wider realities of the country, and the social-institutional-economic structures of Malaysia as well. Whether the future will witness the resurgence of the ulama faction within the party will partly depend on whether the global environment will occasion another crisis of faith and/or moral panic among Muslims; and whether the Malay-centric ethno-nationalist stream will gather strength will also depend upon the political-economic standing of the Malay-Muslims of Malaysia, and whether the dominant majority community will find itself gripped – as it was in the past – by the fear of disempowerment, marginalisation and collective communitarian extinction too. And whether the reformist voices of the party will eventually succeed in their dream of turning PAS into a party of Islamist democrats will depend on the success or failure of similar democratic ventures being undertaken by like-minded Islamist democrats elsewhere, and whether the institutional framework of Malaysia will eventually be opened up to the extent where such reformist intellectual speculation and re-invention can thrive unmolested, without being accused of flippant over-intellectualism – for one does not compose poetry while one's nation burns and the people are starving.

16 Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994.

In short, the viability of the various discourses within PAS, and the viability of PAS itself as a party, depend on the structural-economic circumstances that may or may not allow Islamism to present itself as a genuine alternative to the dominant paradigms of capital-driven development and the modern postcolonial nation-state. And unless and until those conditions are attained and secured, I would argue that none of these discourses will ever be able to successfully mount a challenge to the status quo and capture the state, despite the availability and intelligibility of Islam as the symbolic repertoire known by most. Islam in itself cannot guarantee the success of Islamism, for it (Islamism) requires the right environment to grow, in the same way that one would not dream of planting rice in a barren desert.

But convoluted and complex though the history of PAS has been, it has also been the history of Malaysia. And in charting the many turns and bends that the Islamist party has had to navigate to get to where it is now, we have also retraced the difficult paths that Malaysia has (or has not) taken. It was, and remains, a story fraught with chance, luck, contingency and unpredictability. It has been a story filled with achievements as well as failures, sacrifice as well as treachery, heroism as well as cowardice – which makes the story of PAS a very human story. Above all, it is a story whose narrative does not have a full-stop, and which deserves to be told and retold again, and what a story it is, too.

ご自由にお入りください。

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The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) happens to be one of the oldest and biggest political parties in Malaysia today, though not as well-known as the Jamaat-e Islami of Pakistan or the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt. This is a work that recounts the constructed nature of PAS, as a party that has undergone several transformations – from a left-leaning anti-colonial party in the 1950s and 1960s, to a right-leaning communitarian party in the 1970s, to a party inspired by the Iranian revolution in the 1980s, to its present avatar as a pro-democracy party. It shows how PAS has evolved along a non-linear path, and was shaped by a host of internal and external variable factors that impacted upon Malaysia and its complex society.

Farish A. Noor is Associate Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, and the head of its Contemporary Religion in Southeast Asia Program.

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